

WORLDS OF

SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST 1974 75¢

14155

S*M



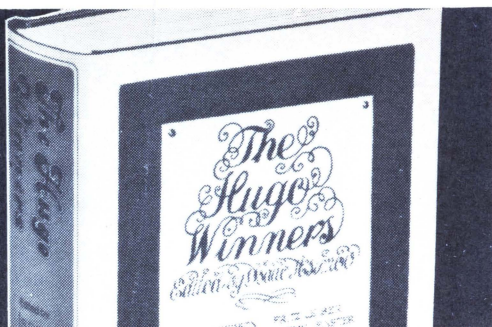
Fritz Leiber
Midnight By The Morphy Watch

Bob SHAW • Isaac ASIMOV
Larry NIVEN • Fred SABERHAGEN

del Rey • Geis • Hoagland • Freff



READ AT YOUR OWN RISK



It's packed with pleasure and excitement . . . crammed with its own rewards. And its own definite risks. You might become hooked for life. You'll know why, once you've sampled: **THE HUGO WINNERS**, an 864-page anthology of 23 tales awarded the Hugo, speculative fiction's Oscar. **DUNE**, by Frank Herbert, winner of both the Hugo and Nebula Awards. Or, **THE GOD'S THEMSELVES**, Isaac Asimov's first novel in fifteen years.

But you decide. Choose any 4 books on this page for just 10¢ and you're on your way to mind-bending membership in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Here's how the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your choice of 4 books for just 10¢ plus shipping and handling. If not absolutely fascinated, return them within ten days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin. *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill

out the convenient form always provided, and return it by the date specified. We try to allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you do not get the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive unwanted books, return them at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. Most books cost only \$1.98 plus shipping and handling. Occasionally, extra-value selections are slightly higher. So join now. Send no money. But mail the coupon today.

ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢ with membership

Science Fiction Book Club 45-S123

Dept. FR-073, Garden City, New York 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter.

--	--	--	--

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss

Please print

Address

City State Zip

8532. **The Hugo Winners**, Vol. 1 & II. Giant 2 in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. \$15.45

1032. **Rendezvous With Rama** by Arthur C. Clarke. From *Childhood's End* author, dazzling, visionary novel of a self-contained world in space. Pub. ed. \$6.95

6221. **The Foundation Trilogy** by Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. Pub. ed. \$14.85

8037. **Again, Dangerous Visions**, Harlan Ellison, ed. Forty-six pieces, short stories & novels. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. \$12.95

2451. **The Mastermind of Mars & A Fighting Man of Mars**. Two of Edgar Rice Burroughs' exciting Martian novels in one volume. Illus. by Frank Frazetta. Spec. Ed.

6072. **Science Fiction Hall of Fame**, Vol. 2B. Ed. by Ben Bova. Eleven more great novellas, by Asimov, Simak, Pohl, others. Pub. ed. \$9.95

2261. **The Inferno**. By Fred & Geoffrey Hoyle. A tasty Scottish physicist takes charge when a deadly quasar threatens the earth. Pub. ed. \$5.95

1164. **The 1973 Annual World's Best S.F.**, ed. Donald A. Wollheim. 10 novellas, short stories; Anderson, Simak, others. Spec. Ed.

2303. **Hellstrom's Hive**. By Frank Herbert. Insect menace! A hair-raising sequel to the smash movie *The Hellstrom Chronicle*. Spec. Ed.

6049. **Science Fiction Hall of Fame**, Vol. 2A. Ed. by Ben Bova. Eleven all-time great novellas chosen by Sci-Fi Writers of America. Pub. ed. \$9.95

6023. **The Gods Themselves** by Isaac Asimov. The master's first novel in 15 years . . . and worth the wait for a fabulous trip to the year 3000. Pub. ed. \$5.95

2394. **ASTOUNDING**. Harry Harrison, Ed. A memorial anthology for pioneer sci-fi editor John W. Campbell, with 13 original stories by top writers. Pub. ed. \$7.95

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.



POSTPAID ECONOMY PACKS

- A. **Science Fiction:** Slow Death 2, 3, 4, 5; Brain Fantasy; American Flyer 1, 2; Fever Dreams; Slow Death 6 (.75)
- B. **Spine-tingling Horror:** Skull 2, 3, 4, 5; Psychotic Adventures 1; Insect Fear 3; Legion of Charlies; Deviant Slice.
- C. **Fables & Heresies:** Tales From the Leather Nun; Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary; Spasm; Grim Wit 2 (\$1)
- D. **Graphic Novels:** Grim Wit 1; Image of the Beast (.75); Psychotic Adventures 2; Inner City Romance 2; Dr. Atomic 2; Harold Hedd 2; Armorkins; Skull 6; Two Fisted Zombies.
- E. **Comix by Women:** Wimmen's Comix 1, 2, 3; Pudge; Tits & Clits; Abortion Eve; Pandora's Box; Manhunt. Girl Fight.
- F. **Hard Hitting Humor & Satire:** Dopin Dan 1, 2, 3; Harold Hedd 1 (\$1); Dr. Atomic 1; Big League Laufs; Short Order; Bijou 8 (.75); Green Dinosaur 2.
- G. **Sexy Stories for Neophytes & Libertines:** Armageddon 1, 2, 3 (\$1); Good Jive 1; Inner City 1; Facts O'Life; Eternal Tales; Hot Crackers; Young Lust 3 (.75).
- H. **30's, 40's, 50's & 60's (you name it) Nostalgia Package:** Greaser 1, 2; Hungry Chuck Biscuits; Corn Fed 1; Merton on the Movement; Tortoise & Hare; Laugh in the Dark; Bakersfield.
- I. **Collector's Robert Crumb:** Peoples; Artistic (.75); XYZ; Mr. Natural 1, 2; Motor City; Homegrown; Black & White.
- J. **E. C. Reprints:** Weird Science 15; Schock Suspense 12; Haunt of Fear 12; Weird Fantasy 13; Crime Suspense 25.
- K. **Recent Releases:** Eight of our most recent publications. Guaranteed quality—get them as they come off the presses.
- L. **Super-Collector's Package:** All of the above comix (except package K). Over 80 comix, a value of \$47.50 for only \$30.00.



Thank you Galaxy readers! Due to your overwhelming response to our previous ad, we are happy to announce 12 new prepaid economy packages of underground comix. You will receive the best art and story telling of today at prices you can afford. Careful selection of the right packages will mean hours of reading pleasure. We believe these adult stories are what you have been waiting for. Just check the package(s) you want and send cash, check or M.O. and a statement of your age (you must be 18 to order these comix) to our address, and presto! !! your mind will be blown

I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

(Signature)

STORES: We offer 40% off retail value on orders over 200 comix. Send for our free catalogue today.

LAST GASP ECO-FUNNIES
1274 FOLSOM STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

TESTING CONCEPTUAL LIMITS SINCE 1970

WORLDS OF



SCIENCE FICTION

**ALL NEW
STORIES**

Arnold E. Abramson, *Publisher*

James Baen, *Editor*

Theodore Sturgeon, *Contributing Editor*

Bonnie Leigland, *Managing Editor*

Lester del Rey, *Feature Editor*

L. C. Murphy, *Subscription Director*

Dick Hoagland, *Science Editor*

John Wright, *Advertising Manager*

Jay Tunick, *Circulation Director*

NOVELETTES

MIDNIGHT BY THE MORPHY WATCH, Fritz Leiber 6

Chess is a game which abounds with examples of Mad Genius. Fritz, in this cryptic tale, explains why.

A LITTLE NIGHT FLYING, Bob Shaw 26

It has always been man's dream to fly like a bird—realization of that dream might entail a few problems, of course . . .

ANGEL FIX, Raccoona Sheldon 148

A story about an alien who wants to do us good guys a favor—while allowing the bad guys to (as they always do) take care of themselves. An IF First.

SHORT STORIES

HALF-BAKED PUBLISHER'S DELIGHT,

Jeffrey S. Hudson & Isaac Asimov 39

A Genuine Literary Curiosity, and very silly. Dr. A's first sf collaboration and Jeff Hudson's first story.

PLAYTHING, Larry Niven 58

Contrary to popular opinion, the returns are not all in concerning the existence of life on the Red Planet. One thing is sure, though—if it is, it's tough.

NO TIME LIKE THE PAST, Jerry Goodz 71

Lust, hate, fear, greed, anger are all dangerous emotions—and the very stuff of life! An IF First.

TUBE, G. C. Edmundson	170
------------------------------------	------------

If you've ever wondered why television programming is so incredibly bad, this story will provide insight.

SERIAL (Part II of II), BERSERKER'S PLANET Fred Saberhagen	74
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------

Continuing the misadventures of Carlos Suomi. He is not a brave man—yet the fate of a planet hangs on the thread of his courage.

FEATURES EDITORIAL	44
-------------------------------------	-----------

Concerning the most significant technological development this decade. A breakthrough which will lead, quite automatically, to the urbanization of the Solar System.

REVOLUTION, Robert D. Enzmann & Richard C. Hoagland	45
----------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------

Torchships Now!—a discussion in the form of a dialogue of the design parameters of a space-vehicle capable of continuous acceleration at one gravity.

THE ALIEN VIEWPOINT, Dick Geis	63
---------------------------------------------	-----------

In which sf is divided into three parts. Other subjects discussed include porn sweatshops, gothic novels, and Barry Malzburg.

READING ROOM, Lester Del Rey	141
-------------------------------------------	------------

Lester looks at series, sequels and various other literary and sub-literary phenomena [THE WASTELAND OF GORE, for example].

Cover by Greg Theakston, from BERSERKER'S PLANET

Worlds of IF is published bimonthly by UPD Publishing Corporation, a subsidiary of Universal Publishing & Distributing Corporation. Arnold E. Abramson, President. Main Offices: 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Single copy: 75c. 12-Issue subscription: \$9.00 in U.S., \$10.00 elsewhere.

Worlds of IF is published in the United Kingdom by Universal-Tandem Publishing Company, Ltd., 14 Gloucester Road, London SW7 4RD. Arnold E. Abramson, Chairman of the Board, Ralph Stokes, Managing Director. Single copy: 30p. 12-Issue subscription in the United Kingdom: 4.20p.

Copyright © 1974 by UPD Publishing Corporation under International, Universal and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and additional mailing offices. The publishers assume no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in U.S.A.

The Galaxy Library

PAPERBACKS OF LASTING FASCINATION

THE GALAXY LIBRARY OF SCIENCE FICTION is a series of the best science fiction published today about worlds of tomorrow Outstanding authors . . . magnetic stories . . . scientific believability . . . low cost To be savored again and again . . . a must for your science fiction library



JUST PUBLISHED

BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, David Gerrold
The city of the apes was on the brink of an horrendous destruction that had happened once—and was suddenly inexorably, happening again.... The apes are back in a new shocker from Twentieth Century-Fox...that will keep you glued till the last page.... AN1139 95¢

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

PATTERNS OF CHAOS, Colin Kapp

A suspense-filled adventure about one man against an unknown civilization that knew of his existence before he was born! AS1118 75¢

OFF CENTER, Damon Knight

A collection of unpredictably imaginative tales by a modern master of science fiction. AS1071 75¢



THE BEST FROM GALAXY,
Galaxy Magazine

A collection of science fiction that challenges the mind and captivates the imagination
AN1039 95¢

THE BEST FROM IF, If Magazine

A collection of mind-bending science fiction adventure that soars beyond the imagination
AN1065 95¢



of Science Fiction

THE RITHIAN TERROR, Damon Knight

Two men pursue the Rithian Monster who has successfully disguised itself as a human being. AS1008 75¢

THE INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, Jack Finney

A nightmare suddenly wrought into stark reality . . . as men and women who look like themselves, act like themselves, but are not themselves. AN1125 95¢

OTHER TITLES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

MEN AND MACHINES, Robert Silverberg, editor

A collection of science-fiction masterworks from Lester Del Rey, Robert Silverberg, Fritz Leiber, James Blish, and six other great writers. AN0765 95¢

GODS FOR TOMORROW, Hans Stefan Santesson

Ten top science fiction writers advance brilliant yet terrifying prediction of tomorrow's beliefs. AX0240 60¢

THE ENDS OF TIME, Robert Silverberg, editor

A compelling and fascinating anthology of seven science-fiction masters exploring the "ends of time." AS0778 75¢

FEAR TODAY — GONE TOMORROW, Robert Bloch

Here is a portrait of ordinary men and women who sought the wrong answer, opened the wrong door to evil. AS0811 75¢

CHAMBERS OF HORRORS, Robert Bloch

Twelve spine-chilling trips into the macabre mind of the author of "Psycho." AX0187 60¢

THE DEMONS OF SANDORRA, Paul Tabori

Voyage only two centuries into the future to find a world filled with luxurious houses of execution. AS0716 75¢

THE AWARD SCIENCE FICTION READER, Alden H. Noron, editor

A completely new anthology of stories never before published in book form by masters of science fantasy. AX0181 60¢

THE END OF MAN?, Olof Johannesson

A look into the future when a massive computer system provides all of man's earthly needs. AX0448 60¢

AT GOOD NEWSSTANDS AND BOOKSTORES, OR ORDER DIRECTLY FROM: AWARD BOOKS, Dept. - H, P.O. Box 100, Commack, N.Y. 11717 (Please add 25¢ for shipping)



*This is a story of the future
and the past. As for the present . . .*

MIDNIGHT BY THE MORPHY WATCH

BEING World's Chess Champion (crowned or uncrowned), puts a more deadly and maddening strain on a man even than being President of the United States. We have a

prime example enthroned right now. For more than ten years the present champion was clearly the greatest chess player in the world, but during that time he exhibited

such willful and seemingly self-destructive behavior—refusing to enter crucial tournaments, quitting them for crankish reasons while holding a commanding lead, entertaining what many called a paranoid delusion that the whole world was plotting to keep him from reaching the top—that many informed experts wrote him off as a contender for the highest honors. Even his staunchest supporters experienced agonizing doubts—until he finally silenced his foes and supremely satisfied his friends by decisively winning the crucial and ultimate match on a fantastic polar island.

Even minor players bitten by the world's-championship bug—or the fantasy of it—experience a bit of that terrible strain, occasionally in very strange and even eerie fashion . . .

STIRF Ritter-Rebil was indulging in one of his numerous creative avocations—wandering at random through his beloved downtown San Francisco with its sometimes dizzily slanting sidewalks, its elusive narrow courts and alleys, and its kaleidoscope of ever-changing store and restaurant-fronts amongst the ones that persist as landmarks. To divert his gaze, there were interesting almond and black faces among the paler ones. There was the dangerous surge of traffic threatening to invade the humpy sidewalks.

The sky was a careless silvery

gray, like an expensive whore's mink coat covering bizarre garb or nakedness. There were even wisps of fog, that Bay Area benison. There were bankers and hippies, con men and corporation men, queers of all varieties, beggars and sports, murderers and saints (at least in Ritter's freewheeling imagination). And there were certainly alluring girls aplenty in an astounding variety of packages—and pretty girls are the essential spice in any really tasty ragout of people. In fact there may well have been Martians and time travelers.

Ritter's ramble had taken on an even more dreamlike, whimsical and unpredictable quality than usual—with an unflagging anticipation of mystery, surprise, and erotic or diamond-studded adventure around the very next corner.

He frequently thought of himself by his middle name, Ritter, because he was a sporadically ardent chess player now in the midst of a sporad. In German "Ritter" means "knight," yet Germans do not call a knight a Ritter, but a springer, or jumper (for its crookedly hopping move), a matter for inexhaustible philological, historical, and socio-racial speculation. Ritter was also a deeply devoted student of the history of chess, both in its serious and anecdotal aspects.

He was a tall, white-haired man, rather thin, saved from the look of mere age by ravaged handsomeness, an altogether youthful though

worldly and sympathetically cynical curiosity in his gaze (when he wasn't daydreaming), and a definitely though unobtrusively theatrical carriage.

He was more daydreamingly lost than usual on this particular ramble, though vividly aware of all sorts of floating, freakish, beautiful and grotesque novelties about him. Later he recollected that he must have been fairly near Portsmouth Square and not terribly far from the intersection of California and Montgomery. At all events, he was fascinatedly looking into the display window of a secondhand store he'd never recalled seeing before. It must be a new place, for he knew all the stores in the area, yet it had the dust and dinginess of an *old* place—its owner must have moved in without refurbishing the premises or even cleaning them up. And it had a delightful range of items for sale, from genuine antiques to mod facsimiles of same. He noted in his first scanning glance, and with growing delight, a Civil War saber, a standard promotional replica of the starship *Enterprise*, a brand-new deck of tarots, an authentic shrunken head like a black globule of detritus from a giant's nostril, some fancy roach-clips, a silver lusterware creamer, a Sony tape recorder, a last year's whiskey jug in the form of a cable car, a scatter of Gene McCarthy and Nixon buttons, a single brass Lucas "King of the Road" headlamp

from a Silver Ghost Rolls Royce, an electric toothbrush, a 1920's radio, a last month's copy of the *Phoenix*, and three dime-a-dozen plastic chess sets.

AND then, suddenly, all these were wiped from his mind. Unnoticed were the distant foghorns, the complaining prow of slowed traffic, the shards of human speech behind him mosiacked with the singsong chatter of Chinatown, the reflection in the plate glass of a girl in a grandmother dress selling flowers, and of opening umbrellas as drops of rain began to sprinkle from the mist. For every atom of Stirf Ritter-Rebil's awareness was burningly concentrated on a small figure seeking anonymity among the randomly set-out chessmen of one of the plastic sets. It was a squat, tarnished silver chess pawn in the form of a barbarian warrior. Ritter knew it was a chess pawn—and what's more, he knew to what fabulous historic set it belonged, because he had seen one of its mates in a rare police photograph given him by a Portuguese chess-playing acquaintance. He knew that he had quite without warning arrived at a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Heart pounding but face a suave mask, he drifted into the store's interior. In situations like this it was all-essential not to let the seller know what you were interested in or even that you were interested at all.

The shadowy interior of the place lived up to its display window. There was the same piquant clutter of dusty memorables and among them several glass cases housing presumably choicer items, behind one of which stood a gaunt yet stocky elderly man whom Ritter sensed was the proprietor, but pretended not even to notice.

But his mind was so concentrated on the tarnished silver pawn he *must* possess that it was a stupefying surprise when his automatically flitting gaze stopped at a second and even greater once-in-a-lifetime item in the glass case behind which the proprietor stood. It was a dingy, old-fashioned gold pocket watch with the hours not in Roman numerals as they should have been in so venerable a time-piece, but in the form of dull gold and silver chess pieces as depicted in game-diagrams. Attached to the watch by a bit of thread was a slim, hexagonal gold key.

Ritter's mind almost froze with excitement. Here was the big brother of the skulking barbarian pawn. Here, its true value almost certainly unknown to its owner, was one of the supreme rarities of the world of chess-memorabilia. Here was no less than the gold watch Paul Morphy, meteorically short-reigned King of American chess, had been given by an adoring public in New York City on May 25, 1859, after the triumphal tour of London and Paris which had

proven him to be perhaps the greatest chess genius of all time.

Ritter veered as if by lazy chance toward the case, his eyes resolutely fixed on a dull silver ankh at the opposite end from the chess watch.

He paused like a sleepwalker across from the proprietor after what seemed like a suitable interval and—hoping the pounding of his heart wasn't audible—made a desultory inquiry about the ankh. The proprietor replied in as casual a fashion, though getting the item out for his inspection.

Ritter brooded over the silver love-cross for a bit, then shook his head and idly asked about another item and still another, working his insidious way toward the Morphy watch.

The proprietor responded to his queries in a low, bored voice, though in each case dutifully getting the item out to show Ritter. He was a very old and completely bald man with a craggy Baltic cast to his features. He vaguely reminded Ritter of someone.

Finally Ritter was asking about an old silver railroad watch next to the one he still refused to look at directly.

Then he shifted to another old watch with a complicated face with tiny windows showing the month and the phases of the moon, on the other side of the one that was keeping his heart a-pound.

His gambit worked. The proprietor at last dragged out the

Morphy watch, saying softly, "Here is an odd old piece that might interest you. The case is solid gold. It threatens to catch your interest, does it not?"

Ritter at last permitted himself a second devouring glance. It confirmed the first. Beyond shadow of a doubt this was the genuine relic that had haunted his thoughts for two thirds of a lifetime.

What he said was "It's odd, all right. What are those funny little figures it has in place of hours?"

"Chessmen," the other explained. "See, that's a King at six o'clock, a pawn at five, a Bishop at four, a Knight at three, a Rook at two, a Queen at one, another King at midnight, and then repeat, eleven to seven, around the dial."

"Why midnight rather than noon?" Ritter asked stupidly. He knew why.

The proprietor's wrinkled fingernail indicated a small window just above the center of the face. In it showed the letters P.M. "That's another rare feature," he explained. "I've handled very few watches that knew the difference between night and day."

"Oh, and I suppose those squares on which the chessmen are placed and which go around the dial in two and a half circles make a sort of checkerboard?"

"Chessboard," the other corrected. "Incidentally, there are exactly 64 squares, the right number."

Ritter nodded. "I suppose you're

asking a fortune for it," he remarked, as if making conversation.

The other shrugged. "Only a thousand dollars."

Ritter's heart skipped a beat. He had more than ten times that in his bank account. A trifle, considering the stake.

But he bargained for the sake of appearances. At one point he argued, "But the watch doesn't run, I suppose."

"But it still has its hands," the old Balt with the hauntingly familiar face countered. "And it still has its works, as you can tell by the weight. They could be repaired, I imagine. A French movement. See, there's the hexagonal winding-key still with it."

A price of seven hundred dollars was finally agreed on. He paid out the fifty dollars he always carried with him and wrote a check for the remainder. After a call to his bank, it was accepted.

The watch was packed in a small box in a nest of fluffy cotton. Ritter put it in a pocket of his jacket and buttoned the flap.

He felt dazed. The Morphy watch, the watch Paul Morphy had kept his whole short life, despite his growing hatred of chess, the watch he had willed to his French admirer and favorite opponent Jules Arnous de Riviere, the watch that had then mysteriously disappeared, the watch of watches—was his!

He felt both weightless and dizzy as he moved toward the street,

which blurred a little.

As he was leaving he noticed in the window something he'd forgotten—he wrote a check for fifty dollars for the silver barbarian pawn without bargaining.

He was in the street, feeling glorious and very tired. Faces and umbrellas were alike blurs. Rain pattered on his face unnoticed, but there came a stab of anxiety.

He held still and very carefully used his left hand to transfer the heavy little box—and the pawn in a twist of paper—to his trouser pocket, where he kept his left hand closed around them. Then he felt secure.

He flagged down a cab and gave his home address.

The passing scene began to come unblurred. He recognized Rimini's Italian Restaurant where his own chess game was now having a little renaissance after five years of foregoing tournament chess because he knew he was too old for it. A chess-smitten young cook there, indulged by the owner, had organized a tourney. The entrants were mostly young people. A tall, moody girl he thought of as the Czarina, who played a remarkable game, and a likeable, loudmouthed young Jewish lawyer he thought of as Rasputin, who played almost as good a game and talked a better one, both stood out. On impulse Ritter had entered the tournament because it was such a trifling one that it didn't really break his rule against playing

serious chess. And, his old skills reviving nicely, he had done well enough to have a firm grip on third place, right behind Rasputin and the Czarina.

But now that he had the Morphy watch . . .

Why the devil should he think that having the Morphy watch should improve his chess game? he asked himself sharply. It was as silly as faith in the power of the relics of saints.

In his hand inside his left pocket the watch box vibrated eagerly, as if it contained a big live insect, a golden bee or beetle. But that, of course, was his imagination.

Stirf Ritter-Rebil (a proper name, he always felt, for a chess player, since they specialize in weird ones, from Euwe to Znosko-Borovsky, from Noteboom to Dus-Chotimirski) lived in a one-room and bath, five blocks west of Union Square and packed with files, books and also paintings wherever the wall space allowed, of his dead wife and parents, and of his son. Now that he was older, he liked living with clues to all of his life in view. There was a fine view of the Pacific and the Golden Gate and their fogs to the west, over a sea of roofs. On the orderly cluttered tables were two fine chess sets with positions set up.

Ritter cleared a space beside one of them and set in its center the box and packet. After a brief pause—as if for propitiatory prayer, he told

himself sardonically—he gingerly took out the Morphy watch and centered it for inspection with the unwrapped silver pawn behind it.

Then, wiping and adjusting his glasses and from time to time employing a large magnifying glass, he examined both treasures exhaustively.

The outer edge of the dial was circled with a ring or wheel of 24 squares, 12 pale and 12 dark alternating. On the pale squares were the figures of chessmen indicating the hours, placed in the order the old Balt had described. The Black pieces went from midnight to five and were of silver set with tiny emeralds or bright jade, as his magnifying glass confirmed. The White pieces went from six to eleven and were of gold set with minute rubies or amethysts. He recalled that descriptions of the watch always mentioned the figures as being colored.

Inside that came a second circle of 24 pale and dark squares.

Finally, inside *that*, there was a two-thirds circle of 16 squares below the center of the dial.

In the corresponding space above the center was the little window showing PM.

The hands on the dial were stopped at 1157—three minutes to midnight.

With a paperknife he carefully pried open the hinged back of the watch, on which were floridly engraved the initials PM—which he

suddenly realized also stood for Paul Morphy.

On the inner golden back covering the works was engraved "France H&H"—the old Balt was right again—while scratched in very tiny—he used his magnifier once more—were a half dozen sets of numbers, most of the sevens having the French slash. Pawnbrokers' marks. Had Arnous de Riviere pawned the treasure? Or later European owners? Oh well, chess players were an impecunious lot. There was also a hole by which the watch could be wound with its hexagonal key. He carefully wound it but of course nothing happened.

He closed the back and brooded on the dial. The 64 squares—24 plus 24 plus 16—made a fantastic circular board. One of the many variants of chess he had played once or twice was cylindrical.

"*Les echecs fantasques*," he quoted. "It's a cynical madman's allegory with its doddering monarch, vampire queen, gangster knights, double-faced bishops, ramming rooks and inane pawns, whose supreme ambition is to change their sex and share the dodderer's bed."

With a sigh of regret he tore his gaze away from the watch and took up the pawn behind it. Here was a grim little fighter, he thought, bringing the tarnished silver figure close to his glasses. Naked longsword clasped against his chest, point down, iron skullcap low on

forehead, face merciless as Death's. What did the golden legionaries look like?

Then Ritter's expression grew grim too, as he decided to do something he'd had in mind ever since glimpsing the barbarian pawn in the window. Making a long arm, he slid out a file drawer and after flipping a few tabs drew out a folder marked "Death of Alekhine." The light was getting bad. He switched on a big desk lamp against the night.

Soon he was studying a singularly empty photograph. It was of an unoccupied old armchair with a peg-in chess set open on one of the flat wooden arms. Behind the chess set stood a tiny figure. Bringing the magnifying glass once more into play, he confirmed what he had expected: that it was a precise mate to the barbarian pawn he had bought today.

He glanced through another item from the folder—an old letter on onionskin paper in a foreign script with cedillas under half the "C's" and tildas over half the "A's."

It was from his Portuguese friend, explaining that the photo was a reproduction of one in the Lisbon police files.

The photo was of the chair in which Alexander Alekhine had been found dead of a heart attack on the top floor of a cheap Lisbon rooming house in 1946.

Alekhine had won the World's Chess Championship from Capa-

blanca in 1927. He had held the world's record for the greatest number of games played simultaneously and blindfolded—32. In 1946 he was preparing for an official match with the Russian champion Botvinnik, although he had played chess for the Axis in World War II. Though at times close to psychosis, he was considered the profoundest and most brilliant attacking player who had ever lived.

Had he also, Ritter asked himself, been one of the players to own the Morphy silver-and-gold chess set and the Morphy watch?

He reached for another file folder labeled "Death of Steinitz." This time he found a brownish daguerreotype showing an empty, narrow, old-fashioned hospital bed with a chessboard and set on a small table beside it. Among the chess pieces, Ritter's magnifier located another one of the unmistakable barbarian pawns.

Wilhelm Steinitz, called the Father of Modern Chess, who had held the world's championship for 28 years, until his defeat by Emanuel Lasker in 1894. Steinitz, who had had two psychotic episodes and been hospitalized for them in the last years of his life, during the second of which he had believed he could move the chess pieces by electricity and challenged God to a match, offering God the odds of Pawn and Move. It was after the second episode that the daguerreotype had been taken

which Ritter had acquired many years ago from the aged Emmanuel Lasker.

Ritter leaned back wearily from the table, took off his glasses and knuckled his tired eyes. It was later than he'd imagined.

He thought about Paul Morphy retiring from chess at the age of 21 after beating every important player in the world and issuing a challenge, never accepted, to take on any master at the odds of Pawn and Move. After that contemptuous gesture in 1859 he had brooded for 25 years, mostly a recluse in his family home in New Orleans, emerging only fastidiously dressed and be-caped for an afternoon promenade and regular attendance at the opera. He suffered paranoid episodes during which he believed his relatives were trying to steal his fortune and, of all things, his clothes. And he never spoke of chess or played it, except for an occasional game with his friend Maurian at the odds of Knight and Move.

Twenty-five years of brooding in solitude without the solace of playing chess, but with the Morphy chess set and the Morphy watch in the same room, testimonials to his world mastery.

Ritter wondered if those circumstances—with Morphy constantly thinking of chess, he felt sure—were not ideal for the transmission of the vibrations of thought and feeling into inanimate objects, in

this case the golden Morphy set and watch.

Material objects intangibly vibrating with 25 years of the greatest chess thought and then by strange chance (chance alone?) falling into the hands of two other periodically psychotic chess champions, as the photographs of the pawns hinted.

An absurd fancy, Ritter told himself. And yet one to the pursuit of which he had devoted no small part of his life.

And now the richly vibrant objects were in *his* hands. What would be the effect of that on *his* game?

But to speculate in that direction was doubly absurd.

A wave of tiredness went through him. It was close to midnight.

He heated a small supper for himself, consumed it, drew the heavy window drapes tight, and undressed.

He turned back the cover of the big couch next to the table, switched off the light, and inserted himself into bed.

It was Ritter's trick to put himself to sleep by playing through a chess opening in his thoughts. Like any talented player, he could readily contest one blindfold game, though he could not quite visualize the entire board and often had to count moves square by square, especially with the Bishops. He selected Breyer's Gamit, an old favorite of his.

He made a half dozen moves.

Then suddenly the board was brightly illuminated in his mind, as if a light had been turned on there. He had to stare around to assure himself that the room was still dark as pitch. There was only the bright board inside his head.

His sense of awe was lost in luxuriant delight. He moved the mental pieces rapidly, yet saw deep into the possibilities of each position.

Far in the background he heard a church clock on Franklin boom out the dozen strokes of midnight. After a short while he announced mate in five by White. Black studied the position for perhaps a minute, then resigned.

Lying flat on his back he took several deep breaths. Never before had he played such a brilliant blindfold game—or game with sight even. That it was a game with himself didn't seem to matter—his personality had split neatly into two players.

He studied the final position for a last time, returned the pieces to their starting positions in his head, and rested a bit before beginning another game.

It was then he heard the ticking, a nervous sound five times as fast as the distant clock had knelled. He lifted his wristwatch to his ear. Yes, it was ticking rapidly too, but this was another ticking, louder.

He sat up silently in bed, leaned over the table, switched on the light.

THE Morphy watch. That was where the louder ticks were coming from. The hands stood at twelve ten and the small window showed AM.

For a long while he held that position—mute, motionless, aghast, wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.

Let's see, Edgar Allan Poe had died when Morphy was 12 years old and beating his uncle, Ernest Morphy, then chess king of New Orleans.

It seemed impossible that a stopped watch with works well over one hundred years old should begin to run. Doubly impossible that it should begin to run at approximately the right time—his wrist watch and the Morphy watch were no more than a minute apart.

Yet the works might be in better shape than either he or the old Balt had guessed; watches did capriciously start and stop running. Coincidences were only coincidences.

Yet he felt profoundly uneasy. He pinched himself and went through the other childish tests.

He said aloud, "I am Stirf Ritter-Rebil, an old man who lives in San Francisco and plays chess, and who yesterday discovered an unusual curio. But really, everything is perfectly normal . . ."

Nevertheless, he suddenly got the feeling of "A man-eating lion is a prowler." It was the childish form terror still took for him on rare oc-

casions. For a minute or so everything seemed *too* still, despite the ticking. The stirring of the heavy drapes at the window gave him a shiver, and the walls seemed thin, their protective power nil.

Gradually the sense of a killer lion moving outside them faded and his nerves calmed.

He switched off the light, the bright mental board returned, and the ticking became reassuring rather than otherwise. He began another game with himself, playing for Black the Classical Defense to the Ruy Lopez, another of his favorites.

This game proceeded as brilliantly and vividly as the first. There was the sense of a slim, man-shaped glow standing beside the bright board in the mental dark. After a while the shape grew amorphous and less bright; then split into three. However, it bothered him little, and when he at last announced mate in three for Black, he felt great satisfaction and profound fatigue.

Next day he was in exceptionally good spirits. Sunlight banished all night's terrors as he went about his ordinary business and writing chores. From time to time he reassured himself that he could still visualize a mental chessboard very clearly, and he thought now and again about the historical chess mystery he was in the midst of solving. The ticking of the Morphy watch carried an exciting, eager

note. Toward the end of the afternoon he realized he was keenly anticipating visiting Rimini's to show off his new-found skill.

He got out an old gold watch chain and fob, snapped it to the Morphy watch, which he carefully wound again, pocketed them securely in his vest, and set out for Rimini's. It was a grand day—cool, brightly sunlit and a little windy. His steps were brisk. He wasn't thinking of all the strange happenings but of *chess*. It's been said that a man can lose his wife one day and forget her that night, playing *chess*.

Rimini's was a good, dark, garlic-smelling restaurant with an annex devoted to drinks, substantial free pasta appetizers and, for the nonce, chess. As he drifted into the long L-shaped room, Ritter became pleasantly aware of the row of boards, chessmen, and the intent, mostly young, faces bent above them.

Then Rasputin was grinning at him calculatedly and yapping at him cheerfully. They were due to play their tournament game. They checked out a set and were soon at it. Beside them the Czarina also contested a crucial game, her moody face askew almost as if her neck were broken, her bent wrists near her chin, her long fingers pointing rapidly at her pieces as she calculated combinations, like a sorceress putting a spell on them.

Ritter was aware of her, but only peripherally. For last night's bright

YOURS FOR ONLY \$39⁹⁵

Three great books by Stanislaw Lem and four more of the best in European Science Fiction.



A \$50.65 value at a saving of more than 20%—a great introduction to the new Continuum Books European Science Fiction Series.

1. Stanislaw Lem

THE CYBERIAD

Fables for the Cybernetic Age

The escapades of two robot cosmic constructors that "manage to be truly amusing and profoundly disturbing at the same time."—*Leslie A. Fiedler*. \$8.95

2. Franz Rottensteiner, Editor

VIEW FROM ANOTHER SHORE

An exciting anthology of European Science Fiction. \$6.95

3. Arkadi and Boris Strugatski

HARD TO BE A GOD

"A straightforward adventure story."

—*Ursula K. Le Guin*. \$6.95

4. Stanislaw Lem

THE INVINCIBLE

"A rousing adventure in the technological mode."—*Ursula K. Le Guin*. \$6.95

5. Stanislaw Lem

MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB

Brilliant espionage satire, "a delightful book."—*Joanna Russ*. \$6.95

6. Jacques Sternberg

FUTURE WITHOUT FUTURE

Short stories by a young French master of black humor. \$6.95

7. Stefan Wul

THE TEMPLE OF THE PAST

A fast moving French science fiction classic. \$6.95

Seabury Bookstore
815 Second Avenue, New York 10017

Gentlemen:

Please send me all seven European Sci-fi books, postage paid. Enclosed find my check for \$39.95.

Please send me the following books:

—1 (\$8.95 ea.); —2 (\$6.95 ea.);

—3 (\$6.95 ea.); —4 (\$6.95 ea.);

—5 (\$6.95 ea.); —6 (\$6.95 ea.);

—7 (\$6.95 ea.). Postage paid.

Enclosed is my check for \$_____.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____ Zip_____

(Please add sales tax where applicable.)

IF

mental board had returned, only now it was superimposed on the actual board before him. Complex combinations sprang to mind effortlessly. He beat Rasputin like a child. The Czarina caught the win from the corner of her eye and growled faintly in approval. She was winning her own game; Ritter beating Rasputin bumped her into first place. Rasputin was silent for once.

A youngish man with a black mustache was sharply inspecting Ritter's win. He was the California state champion, Martinez, who had recently played a simultaneous at Rimini's, winning fifteen games, losing none, drawing only with the Czarina. He now suggested a casual game to Ritter, who nodded somewhat abstractedly.

They contested two very hairy games—a Sicilian Defense by Martinez in which Ritter advanced all his pawns in front of his castled King in a wild-looking attack, and a Ruy Lopez by Martinez that Ritter answered with the Classical Defense, going to great lengths to preserve his powerful King's Bishop. The mental board stayed superimposed, and it almost seemed to Ritter that there was a small faint halo over the piece he must next move or capture. To his mild astonishment he won both games.

A small group of chess-playing onlookers had gathered around their board. Martinez was looking at him speculatively, as if to ask,

"Now just where did you spring from, old man, with your power game? I don't recall ever hearing of you."

Ritter's contentment would have been complete, except that among the kibitzers, toward the back, there was a slim young man whose face was always shadowed when Ritter glimpsed it. Ritter saw him in three different places, though never in movement and never for more than an instant. Somehow he seemed one onlooker too many. This disturbed Ritter obscurely, and his face had a thoughtful, abstracted expression when he finally quit Rimini's for the faintly drizzling evening streets. After a block he looked around, but so far as he could tell, he wasn't being followed. This time he walked the whole way to his apartment, passing several landmarks of Dashiell Hammett, Sam Spade, and *The Maltese Falcon*.

Gradually, under the benison of the foggy droplets, his mood changed to one of exaltation. He had just now played some beautiful chess, he was in the midst of an amazing historic chess mystery he'd always yearned to penetrate, and somehow the Morphy watch was working for him—he could actually hear its muffled ticking in the street, coming up from his waist to his ear.

Tonight his room was a most welcome retreat, his place, like an extension of his mind. He fed himself. Then he reviewed, with a Sherlock

Holmes smile, what he found himself calling "The Curious Case of the Morphy Timepiece." He wished he had a Dr. Watson to hear him expound. First, the appearance of the watch after Morphy returned to New York on the *Persia* in 1859. Over paranoid years Morphy had imbued it with psychic energy and vast chessic wisdom. Or else—mark this, Doctor—he had set up the conditions whereby subsequent owners of the watch would *think* he had done such, for the supernatural is not our balliwick, Watson. Next (after de Riviere) great Steinitz had come into possession of it and challenged God and died mad. Then, after a gap, paranoid Alekhine had owned it and devised diabolically brilliant, hyper-Morphian strategies of attack, and died all alone after a thousand treacheries in a miserable Lisbon flat with a peg-in chess set and the telltale barbarian pawn next to his corpse. Finally after a hiatus of almost thirty years (where had the watch and set been then? Who'd had their custody? Who was the old Balt?) the timepiece and a pawn had come into his own possession. A unique case, Doctor. There isn't even a parallel in Prague in 1863.

The nighted fog pressed against the windowpane and now and again a little rain pattered. San Francisco was a London City and had its own resident great detective. One of Dashiell Hammett's hobbies had been chess, even though there was

no record of Spade having played the game.

From time to time Ritter studied the Morphy watch as it glowed and ticked on the table space he'd cleared. PM once more, he noted. The time: White Queen, ruby glittering, past Black King, microscopically emerald studded—I mean five minutes past midnight, Doctor. The witching hour, as the superstitiously-minded would have it.

But to bed, to bed, Watson. We have much to do tomorrow—and, paradoxically, tonight.

Seriously, Ritter was glad when the golden glow winked out on the watch face, though the strident ticking kept on, and he wriggled himself into his couch-bed and arranged himself for thought. The mental board flashed on once more and he began to play. First he reviewed all the best games he'd ever played in his life—there weren't very many—discovering variations he'd never dreamed of before. Then he played through all his favorite games in the history of chess, from MacDonnell-La Bourdonnais to Fischer-Spasski, not forgetting Steinitz-Zukertort and Alekhine-Bogolyubov. They were richer masterpieces than ever before—the mental board saw very deep. Finally he split his mind again and challenged himself to an eight-game blindfold match, Black against White. Against all expectation, Black won with three wins, two losses, and three draws.

But the night was not all imaginative and ratiocinative delight. Twice there came periods of eerie silence, which the ticking of the watch in the dark made only more complete, and two spells of the man-eating lion a-prowl that raised his hair at the roots. Once again there loomed the slim, faint, man-shaped glow beside the mental board and he wouldn't go away. Worse, he was joined by two other man-shaped glows, one short and stocky, with a limp, the other fairly tall, stocky too, and restless. These inner intruders bothered Ritter increasingly—who were they? And wasn't there beginning to be a faint fourth? He recalled the slim young elusive watcher with shadowed face of his games with Martinez and wondered if there was a connection.

Disturbing stuff—and most disturbing of all, the apprehension that his mind might be racked apart and fragmented abroad with all its machine-gun thinking, that it already extended by chessic veins from one chess-playing planet to another, to the ends of the universe.

He was profoundly glad when toward the end of his self-match, his brain began to dull and slow. His last memory was of an attempt to invent a game to be played on the circular board on the watch dial. He thought he was succeeding as his mind at last went spiraling off into unconsciousness.

Next day he awoke restless, scratchy, and eager—and with the

feeling that the three or four dim figures had stood around his couch all night vibrating like strobe lights to the rhythm of the Morphy watch.

Coffee heightened his alert nervousness. He rapidly dressed, snapped the Morphy watch to its chain and fob, pocketed the silver pawn, and went out to hunt down the store where he'd purchased the two items.

In a sense he never found it, though he tramped and minutely scanned Montgomery, Kearny, Grant, Stockton, Clay, Sacramento, California, Pine, Bush, and all the rest.

What he did find at long last was a store window with a grotesque pattern of dust on it that he was certain was identical with that on the window through which he had first glimpsed the barbarian Pawn day before yesterday.

Only now the display space behind the window was empty and the whole store too, except for a tall, lanky Black with a fabulous Afro hair-do, sweeping up.

Ritter struck up a conversation with the man as he worked, and slowly winning his confidence, discovered that he was one of three partners opening a store there that would be stocked solely with African imports.

Finally, after the Black had fetched a great steaming pail of soapy water and a long-handled roller mop and begun to efface forever the map of dust by which

Ritter had identified the place, the man at last grew confidential.

"Yeah," he said, "there *was* a queer old character had a second-hand store here until yesterday that had every crazy thing you could dig for sale, some junk, some real fancy. Then he cleared everything out into two big trucks in a great rush, with me breathing down his neck every minute because he'd been supposed to do it the day before.

"Oh, but he was a fabulous cat, though," the Black went on with a reminiscent grin as he sloshed away the last peninsulas and archipelagos of the dust map. "One time he said to me, 'Excuse me while I rest,' and—you're not going to believe this—he went into a corner and stood on his head. I'm telling you he did, man. I'd like to bust a gut. I thought he'd have a stroke—and he did get a bit lavender in the face—but after three minutes exact—I timed him—he flipped back onto his feet neat as you could ask and went on with his work twice as fast as before, supervising his carriers out of their skulls. Wow, that was an event."

Ritter departed without comment. He had got the final clue he'd been seeking to the identity of the old Balt and likewise the fourth and most shadowy form that had begun to haunt his mental chessboard.

Casually standing on his head, saying "It threatens to catch your

interest"—why, it had to be Aaron Nimzovich, most hyper-eccentric player of them all and Father of Hypermodern Chess, who had been Alekhine's most dangerous but ever-evaded challenger. Why, the old Balt had even looked exactly like an aged Nimzovich—hence Ritter's constant sense of a facial familiarity. Of course, Nimzovich had supposedly died in the 1930's in his home city of Riga in the U.S.S.R., but what were life and breath to the forces with which Ritter was now embroiled?

It seemed to him that there were four dim figures stalking him relentlessly as lions right now in the Chinatown crowds, while despite the noise he could hear and feel the ticking of the Morphy watch at his waist.

He fled to the Danish Kitchen at the St. Francis Hotel and consumed cup on cup of good coffee and two orders of Eggs Benedict, and had his mental chessboard flashing on and off in his mind like a strobe light, and wondered if he shouldn't hurl the Morphy watch into the Bay to be rid of the influence racking his mind apart and destroying his sense of reality.

But then with the approach of evening, the urge toward *chess* gripped him more and more imperiously and he headed once again for Rimini's.

Rasputin and the Czarina were there and also Martinez again, and with the last a distinguished silver-

haired man whom Martinez introduced as the South American international master, Pontebello, suggesting that he and Ritter have a quick game.

The board glowed again with the superimposed mental one, the halos were there once more, and Ritter won as if against a tyro.

At that, chess fever seized him entirely and he suggested he immediately play four simultaneous blindfold games with the two masters and the Czarina and Rasputin, Pontebello acting also as referee.

There were incredulous looks aplenty at that, but he *had* won those two games from Martinez and now the one from Pontebello, so arrangements were quickly made, Ritter insisting on an actual blindfold. All the other players crowded around to observe.

The simul began. There were now four mental boards glowing in Ritter's mind. It did not matter—*now*—that there were four dim forms with them, one by each. Ritter played with a practiced brilliance, combinations bubbled, he called out his moves crisply and unerringly. And so he beat the Czarina and Rasputin quickly. Pontebello took a little longer, and he drew with Martinez by perpetual check.

There was silence as he took off the blindfold to scan a circle of astonished faces and four shadowed ones behind them. He felt the joy of absolute chess mastery. The only sound he heard was the ticking,

thunderous to him, of the Morphy watch.

Pontebello was first to speak. To Ritter, "Do you realize, master, what you've just done?" To Martinez, "Have you the scores of all four games?" To Ritter again, "Excuse me, but you look pale, as if you've just seen a ghost." "Four," Ritter corrected quietly. "Those of Morphy, Steinitz, Alekhine, and Nimzovich."

"Under the circumstances, most appropriate," commented Pontebello, while Ritter sought out again the four shadowed faces in the background. They were still there, though they had shifted their positions and withdrawn a little into the varied darknesses of Rimini's.

Amid talk of scheduling another blindfold exhibition and writing a multiple-signed letter describing tonight's simul to the U.S. Chess Federation—not to mention Pontebello's searching queries as to Ritter's chess career—he tore himself away and made for home through the dark streets, certain that four shadowy figures stalked behind him. The call of the mental chess in his own room was not to be denied.

Ritter forgot no moment of that night, for he did not sleep at all. The glowing board in his mind was an unquenchable beacon, an all-demanding mandala. He replayed all the important games of history, finding new moves. He contested two matches with himself, then one

each with Morphy, Steinitz, Alekhine and Nimzovich, winning the first two, drawing the third, and losing the last by a half point. Nimzovich was the only one to speak, saying, "I am both dead and alive, as I'm sure you know. Please don't smoke, or threaten to."

He stacked eight mental boards and played two games of three-dimensional chess, Black winning both. He traveled to the ends of the universe, finding chess everywhere he went, and contesting a long game, more complex than 3-D chess, on which the fate of the universe depended. He drew it.

And all through the long night the four were with him in the room and the man-eating lion stared in through the window with black-and-white checkered mask and silver mane. While the Morphy watch ticked like a death-march drum. All figures vanished when the dawn came creeping, though the mental board stayed bright and busy into full daylight and showed no signs of vanishing ever. Ritter felt overpoweringly tired, his mind racked to atoms, on the verge of death.

But he knew what he had to do. He got a small box and packed into it, in cotton wool, the silver barbarian Pawn, the old photograph and daguerrotype, and a piece of paper on which he scribbled only:

Morphy, 1859-1884

de Riviere, 1884 - ?

Steinitz, ? - 1900

Alekhine, ? - 1946

Nimzovich, 1946 - now

Ritter-Rebil, 3 days

Then he packed the watch in the box too, it stopped ticking, its hands were still at last, and in Ritter's mind the mental board winked out.

He took one last devouring gaze at the grotesque, glittering dial. Then he shut the box, wrapped and sealed and corded it, boldly wrote on it in black ink "Chess Champion of the World" and added the proper address.

He took it to the post office on Van Ness and sent it off by registered mail. Then he went home and slept like the dead.

RITTER never received a response. But he never got the box back either. Sometimes he wonders if the subsequent strange events in the Champion's life might have had anything to do with the gift.

And on even rarer occasions he wonders what would have happened if he had faced the challenge of death and let his mind be racked to bits, if that was what was to happen.

But on the whole he is content. Questions from Martinez and the others he has put off with purposefully vague remarks.

He still plays chess at Rimini's. Once he won another game from Martinez, when the latter was contesting a simul against twenty-three players.

The greatest collection of science fiction classics ever published! Rare masterpieces — collector's items — long out of print — now available in fine, permanent editions!

23 CLASSICS OF SCIENCE FICTION

Selected by Sam Moskowitz, world's leading science fiction historian

Landmark works of the last three centuries—remarkable novels and stories of speculation, prophecy, fantasy and high adventure that probed the unknown, penetrated the unseen, and often predicted the future. Now reprinted, with important new introductory material by such leading authorities as Lester Del Ray, L. Sprague de

Camp and others. Most of the works have long been out of print and impossible (or impossibly expensive) to obtain. Great reading—in a beautifully printed limited edition. Choice of cloth or fine, permanent paper, astonishingly low-priced for books of this quality. A proud addition to your library!

Just check the books you want,
fill in the order form
tear out and mail this entire ad.

L. Frank Baum, **THE MASTER KEY**
The only science fiction work by the creator
of the Oz series.

☐ Cloth, \$8.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.75

Karel Capek, **THE ABSOLUTE AT LARGE**
Author of RUR, originator of the robot, in
a stunning work on atomic power.

☐ Cloth, \$8.50 ☐ Paper, \$3.50

Robert W. Chambers,
IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN
Swift-moving tales of an incredible "lost
world".

☐ Cloth, \$8.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.75

William Wallace Cook,
A ROUND TRIP TO THE YEAR 2000
First work to feature "mechanical men."

A gem.
☐ Cloth, \$9.50 ☐ Paper, \$3.85

Ray Cummings,
THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM
First work to explore World of the atom.
Contains complete *Golden Atom* series.

☐ Cloth, \$9.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.95

George Allan England,
DARKNESS AND DAWN
Trilogy in one volume—the first adventure
into the blasted world of the future.

☐ Cloth, \$13.95 ☐ Paper, \$5.95

Percy Greg, **ACROSS THE ZODIAC**
Two volumes in one. One of the earliest—and
best—on interplanetary travel.

☐ Cloth, \$13.50 ☐ Paper, \$5.50

George Griffith,
THE ANGEL OF THE REVOLUTION
Stunning "war of the worlds" novel,
antedating H.G. Wells.

☐ Cloth, \$11.50 ☐ Paper, \$4.75

George Griffith, **OLGA ROMANOFF**
Sequel to "Angel", 100 years later.
Sensational battles, comet clash, everything!

☐ Cloth, \$10.50 ☐ Paper, \$4.25

Milo Hastings,
CITY OF ENDLESS NIGHT

One of the best ever written about an incredible underground civilization.

☐ Cloth, \$9.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.95

David H. Keller,
LIFE EVERLASTING and Other Tales
Horror, wry humor, Poe-esque. First psychological science fiction.

☐ Cloth, \$10.50 ☐ Paper, \$4.25

Harold Lamb, MARCHING SANDS
Author of *Genghis Khan*, in a stunning science fiction exploration into the past!

☐ Cloth, \$9.50 ☐ Paper, \$3.75

A. Merritt, THE METAL MONSTER
Finest work by perhaps the world's most popular science fiction writer.

☐ Cloth, \$7.95 ☐ Paper, \$2.95

Robert Paltock, PETER WILKINS
Published 1751—a charmer about a race of winged people.

☐ Cloth, \$10.95 ☐ Paper, \$4.50

Gustavus W. Pope, JOURNEY TO MARS
Earliest known visit to Mars, fast-paced, anticipates Edgar Rice Burroughs.

☐ Cloth, \$12.95 ☐ Paper, \$5.25

William Henry Rhodes,
CAXTON'S BOOK

Scared readers in 1852 believed these horrendous tales to be fact—careful!

☐ Cloth, \$8.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.75

Victor Rousseau,
THE MESSIAH OF THE CYLINDER
First publication since 1917. Superb, fast-paced anti-Utopian forerunner of 1984.

☐ Cloth, \$9.50 ☐ Paper, \$3.85

Garrett P. Serviss,
A COLUMBUS OF SPACE
Smashing adventure—one of the first stories to use atomic power for space travel.

☐ Cloth, \$9.50 ☐ Paper, \$3.95

Garrett P. Serviss,
THE SECOND DELUGE
Undoubtedly the greatest science fiction work on theme of a world-wide flood.

☐ Cloth, \$10.95 ☐ Paper, \$4.50

Olaf Stapledon,
DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT
A Mind-stretching First American Publication by one of the all-time science fiction greats.

☐ Cloth, \$7.50 ☐ Paper, \$2.95

Gabriel de Tarde, UNDERGROUND MAN
Incredible Utopian adventure, published in 1905, by a far-seeing master criminologist.

☐ Cloth, \$7.50 ☐ Paper, \$2.95

Stanley G. Weinbaum,
A MARTIAN ODYSSEY and Other Tales
First edition of Weinbaum's collected tales, including some previously uncollected!

☐ Cloth, \$13.50 ☐ Paper, \$5.75

Philip Wylie, GLADIATOR
The first Superman (and model for later ones), by author of *Generation of Vipers*.

☐ Cloth, \$9.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.95

Six out of print masterpieces by Sam Moskowitz

THE IMMORTAL STORM
Lively history of science fiction fandom. Many early pix of science fiction greats.

☐ Cloth, \$8.95 ☐ Paper, \$3.50

EXPLORERS OF THE INFINITE
The shapers of science fiction from the 1700's through the 1930's. Essential reference

☐ Cloth, \$9.75 ☐ Paper, \$3.95

MASTERPIECES OF SCIENCE FICTION
A treasury of science fiction by the authors examined in "Explorers".

☐ Cloth, \$12.95 ☐ Paper, \$4.95

SEEKERS OF TOMORROW
Critical and biographical study of 22 leading science fiction authors of last 3 decades.

☐ Cloth, \$11.50 ☐ Paper, \$4.75

MODERN MASTERPIECES OF SCIENCE FICTION

21 great stories by writers appraised in *Seekers of Tomorrow*.

☐ Cloth, \$12.95 ☐ Paper, \$4.95

SCIENCE FICTION BY GASLIGHT
Masterful history—and anthology—of science fiction writers from 1891-1911.

☐ Cloth, \$9.95 ☐ Paper, \$4.25

ORDER FORM

Hyperion Press, Inc.
45 Riverside Avenue
Westport, Conn. 06880

Please send me the titles I have checked.

My total order is: \$ _____

Plus 25¢ per title for postage and handling _____

Sales tax (where applicable) _____

Total check or money order enclosed \$ _____

☐ Please send complete descriptive catalog.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____



A LITTLE NIGHT FLYING

Dedicated to every traffic cop who ever flew.

BOB SHAW

THE DEAD cop came drifting in toward the Birmingham control zone at a height of some three thousand meters. It was a winter night and the sub-zero temperatures which prevailed at that altitude had solidified his limbs, encrusted his entire body with black frost. Blood flowing through shattered armour had frozen into the semblance of a crab, with its claws encircling his chest. The body, which floated upright, rocked gently on stray currents, performing a strange aerial shuffle. And at its waist a pea-sized crimson light blinked on and off, on and off, its radiance gradually fading under a thickening coat of ice.

AIR POLICE Sergeant Robert Hasson felt more exhausted

and edgy than he would have done after an eight-hour crosswind patrol. He had been in the headquarters block since lunchtime, dictating and signing reports, completing forms, trying to wrest from the cashier's office the expenses which had been due to him two months earlier. And then, just as he was about to go home in disgust, he had been summoned to Captain Nunn's office for yet another confrontation over the Wellwyn Angels case. The four on remand—Joe Sullivan, Flick Bugatti, Denny Johnston and Toddy Thoms—were sitting together at one side of the office, still wearing their flying gear.

"I'll tell you what disturbs me most about this whole affair," Bunny Ormerod, the senior bar-

rister, was saying with practiced concern. "It is the utter indifference of the police. It is the callousness with which the tragic death of a child is accepted by the arresting officers." Ormerod moved closer to the four Angels, protectively, identifying with them. "One would think it was an everyday occurrence."

Hasson shrugged. "It is, practically."

Ormerod allowed his jaw to sag and turned so that the brooch recorder on his silk blouse was pointing straight at Hasson. "Would you care to repeat that statement?"

Hasson stared directly into the recorder's watchful iris. "Practically every day, or every night, some moron straps on a CG harness, goes flying around at five or six hundred kilometers an hour, thinking he's Superman, and runs into a pylon or a towerblock. And you're dead right—I don't give a damn when they smear themselves." Hasson could see Nunn becoming agitated but he pressed on doggedly. "It's only when they smash into other people that I get worked up. And then I go after them."

"You hunt them down."

"That's what I do."

"The way you hunted down these children."

Hasson examined the Angels coldly. "I don't see any children. The youngest in that gang is sixteen."

Ormerod directed a compassionate smile toward the four black-clad Angels. "We live in a complex and difficult world, Sergeant. Sixteen years isn't a very long time for a youngster to get to know his way around it."

"Balls," Hasson commented. He looked at the Angels again and pointed at a heavy-set, bearded youth who was sitting behind the others. "You—Toddy—come over here."

Toddy's eyes shuttled briefly. "What for?"

"I want to show Mr. Ormerod your badges."

"Naw. Don't want to," Toddy said smugly. "Sides, I like it better over here."

Hasson sighed, walked to the group, caught hold of Toddy's lapel and walked back to Ormerod as if he was holding nothing but the piece of simulated leather. Behind him he heard frantic swearing and the sound of chairs falling over as Toddy was dragged through the protective screen of his companions. The opportunity to express his feelings in action, no matter how limited, gave Hasson a therapeutic satisfaction.

Nunn half rose to his feet. "What do you think you're doing, Sergeant?"

Hasson ignored him, addressing himself to Ormerod. "See this badge? The big 'F' with wings on it? Do you know what it means?"

"I'm more interested in what

your extraordinary behaviour means." One of Ormerod's hands was purposely, but with every appearance of accident, blocking his recorder's field of view. Hasson knew this was because of recent legislation under which the courts refused to consider any recorded evidence unless the entire spool was presented—and Ormerod did not want a shot of the badge.

"Have a look at it." Hasson repeated his description of the badge for the benefit of the soundtrack. "It means that this quote child unquote has had sexual intercourse in free fall. And he's proud of it. Aren't you, Toddy?"

"Mister Ormerod?" Toddy's eyes were fixed pleadingly on the barrister's face.

"For your own good, Sergeant, I think you should let go of my client," Ormerod said. His slim hand was still hovering in front of the recorder.

"Certainly." Hasson snatched the recorder, plucking a hole in Ormerod's blouse as he did so, and held the little instrument in front of the Angel's array of badges. After a moment he pushed Toddy away from him and gave the recorder back to Ormerod with a flourish of mock-courtesy.

"That was a mistake, Hasson." Ormerod's aristocratic features had begun to show genuine anger. "You've made it obvious that you are engaging in a personal vendetta against my client."

Hasson laughed. "Toddy isn't your client. You were hired by Joe Sullivan's old man to get him out from under a manslaughter charge and big simple Toddy just happens to be in the same bag."

Joe Sullivan, sitting in the center of the other three Angels, opened his mouth to retort but changed his mind. He appeared to have been better rehearsed than his companions.

"That's right," Hasson said to him. "Remember what you were told, Joe—let the hired mouth do all the taking." Sullivan shifted resentfully, stared down at his blue-knuckled hands, and remained silent.

"It's obvious we aren't achieving anything," Ormerod said to Nunn. "I'm going to hold a private conference with my clients."

"Do that," Hasson put in. "Tell them to peel off those badges, won't you? Next time I might pick out an even better one." He waited impassively while Ormerod and two policemen ushered the four Angels out of the room.

"I don't understand you," Nunn said as soon as they were alone. "Exactly what did you think you were doing just now? That boy has only to testify that you manhandled him . . ."

"That boy, as you call him, knows where we could find the Fireman. They all do."

"You're being too hard on them."

"You aren't." Hasson knew at once that he had gone too far but he was too obstinate to begin retracting the words.

"WHAT do you mean?" Nunn's mouth compressed, making him look womanly but nonetheless dangerous.

"Why do I have to talk to that load of scruff up here in your office? What's wrong with the interview rooms downstairs? Or are they only for thugs who haven't got Sullivan money behind them?"

"Are you saying I've taken Sullivan's money?"

Hasson thought for a moment. "I don't believe you'd do that, but you let it make a difference. I tell you those four have flown with the Fireman. If I could be left alone for half an hour with any one of them I'd . . ."

"You'd get yourself put away. You don't seem to understand the way things are, Hasson. You're a skycop—and that means the public doesn't want you about. A hundred years ago motorists disliked traffic cops for making them obey a few common sense rules. Now everybody can fly, better than the birds, and they find this same breed of cop up there with them, spoiling it for them, and they *hate* you."

"I'm not worried."

"I don't think you're worried about police work either, Hasson. Not really. I'd say you're hooked on cloud-running every bit as much as

this mythical Fireman, but you want to play a different game."

Hasson became anxious, aware that Nunn was leading up to something important. "The Fireman is real—I've seen him."

"Whether he is or not, I'm grounding you."

"You can't do that," Hasson blurted instinctively.

Nunn looked interested. "Why not?"

"Because . . ." Hasson was striving for the right words, any words, when the communicator sphere on Nunn's desk lit up redly, signalling a top priority message.

"Go ahead," Nunn said to the sphere.

"Sir, we're picking up an automatic distress call," it replied with a male voice. "Somebody drifting out of control at three thousand meters. We think it must be Inglis."

"Dead?"

"We've interrogated his comm-pack, sir. No response."

"I see. Wait till the rush hour is over and send somebody up for him. I'll want a full report."

"Yes sir."

"I'm going up for him now," Hasson said, moving toward the door.

"You can't go through the traffic streams at this hour." Nunn got to his feet and came around the desk. "And you're grounded. I mean that, Hasson."

Hasson paused, knowing that he

had already stretched to the limit the special indulgence granted to members of the Air Patrol. "That's Lloyd Inglis up there and I'm going up to get him—right now. If he's dead, I'm grounding myself. Permanently. Okay?"

Nunn shook his head uncertainly. "Do you want to kill yourself?"

"Perhaps." Hasson closed the door and ran toward the tackle room.

HE LIFTED off from the roof of the police headquarters into a sky which was ablaze with converging rivers of fire. Work-weary commuters pouring up from the south represented most of the traffic but there were lesser tributaries flowing from many points of the compass into the vast aerial whirlpool of the Birmingham control zone. The shoulder-lights and ankle-lights of thousands upon thousands of fliers shifted and shimmered, changes of parallax causing spurious waves to progress and retrogress along the glowing streams. Vertical columns of brilliance kept the opposing elements apart, creating an appearance of strict order. Hasson knew, however, that the appearance was to some extent deceptive. People who were in a hurry tended to switch off their lights to avoid detection and fly straight to where they were going, regardless of the air corridors. The chances of colliding with another illegal traveller were vanishingly small, they told

themselves. But it was not only occasional salesmen late for appointments who flew wild. There were the drunks and the druggies, the antisocial, the careless, the suicidal, the thrill-seekers, the criminal—a whole spectrum of types who were unready for the responsibilities of personal flight—in whose hands a counter-gravity harness could become an instrument of death.

Hasson set his police flare units at maximum intensity. He climbed cautiously, dye gun at the ready, until the lights of the city were spread out below him in endless glowing geometries. When the information display projected into the inner surface of his visor told him he was at a height of two hundred meters he began paying particular attention to his radar. This was the altitude at which rogue fliers were most numerous. He continued rising steadily, controlling the unease which was a normal reaction to being suspended in a darkness from which, at any moment, other beings could come hurtling toward him at lethal velocity. The aerial river of travelers was now visible as separate laminae that slipped over each other like luminous gauze, uppermost levels moving fastest.

A further eight hundred meters and Hasson began to relax slightly. He was turning his attention to the problem of homing in on Inglis when his proximity alarm sounded and the helmet radar flashed a

bearing. Hasson twisted to face the indicated direction. The figure of a man flying without lights, angled for maximum speed, materialized in the light of Hasson's flare units. Veteran of a thousand such encounters, Hasson had time to calculate a miss distance of about ten meters. Within the fraction of a second available to him he aimed his gun and fired off a cloud of indelible dye. The other man passed through it—glimpse of pale, elated face and dark unseeing eyes—and was gone in a noisy flurry of turbulence. Hasson called HQ and gave details of the incident, adding his opinion that the rogue flier was also guilty of drug abuse. With upward of a million people airborne in the sector at that very moment it was unlikely that the offender would ever be caught—but his flying clothes and equipment had been permanently branded and would have to be replaced at considerable expense.

At three thousand meters Hasson switched to height maintenance power, took a direction-finder reading on Inglis's beacon and began a slow horizontal cruise, eyes probing the darkness ahead. His flares illuminated a thickening mist, which placed him at the center of a sphere of foggy radiance and made it difficult to see anything beyond. This was close to the limit for personal flying without special heaters and Hasson became aware of the cold which was pressing in on him,

searching for a weakness in his defenses. The traffic streams far below looked warm and safe.

A few minutes later Hasson's radar picked up an object straight ahead. He drew closer until, by flarelight, he could make out the figure of Lloyd Inglis performing its grotesque shuffle through the currents of dark air. Hasson knew at once that his friend was dead but he circled the body, keeping just outside field interference distance, until he could see the gaping hole in Inglis's chest plate. The wound looked as though it had been inflicted by a lance . . .

A week earlier Hasson and Inglis had been on routine patrol over Bedford when they had detected a pack of about eight flying without lights. Inglis had loosed off a mini-flare which burst just beyond the group, throwing them briefly into silhouette, and both men had glimpsed the slim outline of a lance. The transportation of *any* solid object by a person using a CG harness was illegal because of the danger to other air travelers and people on the ground, and the carrying of weapons was rare even among rogue fliers. It seemed likely that they had chanced on the Fireman. Spreading their nets and snares, Hasson and Inglis had flown in pursuit. During the subsequent low-level chase two people had died—one of them a young woman, also flying without lights, who had strayed into a head-on col-



ARS GRATIA

lision with one of the gang. The other had been a pack leader who had almost cut himself in two on a radio mast. At the end of it, all the two policemen had had to show for their efforts had been four unimportant members of the Wellwyn Angels. The fireman remained safe in his anonymity.

Now, as he studied the frozen body of his former partner, Hasson understood that the Fireman had been inspired to revenge. His targets would have been identified for him in the news coverage given to the arrest of Joe Sullivan. Swearing in his bitterness and grief, Hasson tilted his body to create a horizontal component in the lift force exerted by his CG harness. He swooped in on the rigid corpse, locked his arms around it. Immediately both bodies began to drop as their counter-gravity fields cancelled each other out. No stranger to free fall, Hasson efficiently attached a line to an eye on Inglis's belt and pushed the dead man away from him. As the two separated to beyond field interference distance the upward rush of air around them gradually ceased. Hasson checked his data display and saw that he had fallen little more than a hundred meters. He paid the line out from a dispenser at his waist until Inglis's body was at a convenient towing distance. Then he flew west, aiming for a point at which it would be safe to descend through the commuter levels. Far beneath him the

traffic of the Birmingham control zone swirled like a golden galaxy, but Hasson—at the center of his own spherical universe of white misty light—was isolated from it, cocooned in his own thoughts.

Lloyd Inglis—the beer-drinking, book-loving spendthrift—was dead. And before him there had been Singleton, Larmor and McMeekin. Half of Hasson's original squad of seven years ago had died in the course of duty . . . and for what? It was impossible to police a human race which had been given its three-dimensional freedom with the advent of the CG harness. Putting a judo hold on gravity, turning the Earth's own attractive force back against itself, had proved to be the only way to fly. It was easy, inexpensive, exhilarating—and impossible to regulate. There were eighty million personal fliers in Britain alone, each one a superman impatient of any curb on his ability to follow the sunset around the curve of the world. Aircraft had vanished from the skies almost overnight, not because their cargo-carrying capacity was no longer needed, but because it was too dangerous to fly them in a medium which was crowded with aerial jaywalkers. The nocturnal rogue flier, the dark Icarus, was the folk hero of the age. What, Hasson asked himself, was the point in being a skycop? Perhaps the whole concept of policing, of being responsible for others, was no longer valid. Perhaps the inevi-

table price of freedom was a slow rain of broken bodies drifting to Earth as their powerpacks faded and . . .

THE attack took Hasson by surprise.

It came so quickly that the proximity alarm and the howling of air displaced by the attacker's body were virtually simultaneous. Hasson turned, saw the black lance, jack-knifed to escape it, received a ferocious glancing blow, and was sent spinning—all in the space of a second. The drop caused by the momentary field interference had been negligible. He switched off his flares and flight lights in a reflexive action and struggled to free his arms from the towline which was being lapped around him by his own rotation. When he had managed to stabilize himself he remained perfectly still and tried to assess the situation. His right hip was throbbing painfully from the impact, but as far as he could tell no bones had been broken. He wondered if his attacker was going to be content with having made a single devastating pass, or if this was the beginning of a duel.

"You were quick, Hasson," a voice called from the darkness. "Quicker than your wingman. But it won't do you any good."

"Who are you?" Hasson shouted as he looked for a radar bearing.

"You know who I am. I'm the Fireman."

"That's a song." Hasson kept his voice steady as he began spreading his snares and nets. "What's your real name? The one your area psychiatrist has on his books," he called out.

The darkness laughed. "Very good, Sergeant Hasson. Playing for time and trying to goad me and learn my name all at once."

"I don't need to play for time—I've already broadcast a QRF."

"By the time anybody gets here you'll be dead, Hasson."

"Why should I be? Why do you want to do this?"

"Why do you hunt my friends and ground them?"

"They're a menace to themselves and to everybody else."

"Only when you make them fly wild. You're kidding yourself, Hasson. You're a skycop and you like hounding people to death. I'm going to ground you for good—and those nets won't help you."

Hasson stared vainly in the direction of the voice. "Nets?"

There was another laugh and the Fireman began to sing. "*I can see you in the dark, 'cause I'm the Fireman; I can fly with you and you don't even know I'm there . . .*"

The familiar words were growing louder as their source drew near, and abruptly Hasson made out the shape of a big man illuminated by the traffic streams below and by starlight from above. He looked fearsome and inhuman in his flying gear.

Hasson yearned for the firearm denied him by British police tradition, and then he noticed something. "Where's the lance?"

"Who needs it? I let it go." The Fireman spread his arms and—even in the dimness, even with the lack of spatial reference points—it became apparent that he was a giant, a man who had no need of weapons other than those which nature had built into him.

Hasson thought of the heavy lance plummeting down into a crowded suburb three thousand meters below and a cryogenic hatred stole through him, reconciling him to the forthcoming struggle, regardless of its outcome. As the Fireman edged closer Hasson whirled a net in slow circles, tilting his harness to counteract the spin induced by the net. He raised his legs in readiness to kick and at the same time finished straightening out the towline which made Inglis's body a ghastly spectator to the event. He felt nervous and keyed up, but not particularly afraid now that the Fireman had discarded his lance. Aerial combat was not a matter of instinct; it was something which had to be learned and practiced, and therefore the professional always had the edge on the amateur, no matter how gifted or strongly motivated the latter might be. For example, the Fireman had made a serious mistake in allowing Hasson to get his legs fully drawn up into the position from which the power

of his thighs could be released in an explosive kick.

Unaware of his blunder, the Fireman edged in slowly, vectoring the lift of his harness with barely perceptible shoulder movements. *He's a good flier*, Hasson thought, *even if he isn't so good on combat theory and . . .*

The Fireman came in fast—but not nearly as fast as he should have done. Hasson experienced something like a sense of luxury as he found himself with time to place his kick exactly where he wanted it. He chose the vulnerable point just below the visor, compensated for the abrupt drop which occurred as both CG fields cancelled out, and unleashed enough energy to snap a man's neck. Somehow the Fireman got his head out of the way in time and caught hold of Hasson's outstretched leg. Both men were falling now, but at an unequal rate because Hasson was tethered to Inglis whose CG field was too far away to have been cancelled. In the second before they parted the Fireman applied the leverage of his massive arms and broke Hasson's leg sideways at the knee.

Pain and shock obliterated Hasson's mind, gutting him of all strength and resolve. He floated in the blackness for an indeterminate period, arms moving uncertainly, face contorted in a silent scream. The great spiral nebula far below continued to spin, but a dark shape was moving steadily across it, and

part of Hasson's mind informed him that there was not time for indulgence in natural reactions to injury. He was hopelessly outclassed on the physical level and if life were to continue it would only be through the exercise of intelligence. But how was he to think when pain had invaded his body like an army and was firing mortar shells of agony straight into his brain?

For a start, Hasson told himself, *you have to get rid of Lloyd Inglis*. He began reeling in his comrade's body with the intention of unhooking it, but almost immediately the Fireman spoke from close behind him.

"How did you like it, Hasson?" The voice was triumphant. "That was to show you I can beat you at your own game. Now we're going to play my game."

Hasson tried drawing the line in faster. Inglis's body bobbed closer and finally came within interference radius. Hasson and Inglis began to fall. The Fireman dived in on them on the instant, hooked an arm around Hasson's body, and all three dropped together. The whirlpool of fire began to expand beneath them.

"This is *my* game," the Fireman sang through the gathering slipstream. *"I can ride you all the way to the ground, 'cause I'm the Fireman."*

Hasson knew the tactics of aerial chicken. He shut out the pain from his trailing leg, reached for his

master switch, but hesitated without throwing it. In two-man chicken the extinguishing of one CG field restored the other one to its normal efficacy, causing a fierce differential which tended to drag one opponent vertically away from the other. The standard countermove was for the second man to kill his own field at the same time so that both bodies would continue to plunge downwards together until somebody's nerve broke and forced him to reactivate his harness. In the present game of death, however, the situation was complicated by the presence of Inglis—the silent partner who had already lost. His field would continue negating those of the other two, regardless of what they did, unless . . .

Hasson freed an arm from the Fireman's mock-sexual embrace and pulled Inglis's body in close. He groped for the dead man's master switch but found only a smooth placque of frozen blood. The jewelled horizons were rising rapidly on all sides now and the circling traffic stream was opening like a carnivorous flower. Air rushed by at terminal velocity, deafeningly. Hasson fought to break the icy casting away from the switch on Inglis's harness, but at that moment the Fireman slid an arm around his neck and pulled his head back.

"Don't try to get away from me," he shouted into Hasson's ear. "Don't try to chicken out—I want

to see how well you bounce.”

They continued to fall.

Hasson, encumbered by his nets, felt for the towline dispenser. He fumbled it open with numb fingers and was about to release Inglis's body when it occurred to him he would gain very little in doing so. An experienced chicken player always delayed breaking out of field interference until the last possible instant, leaving it so late that even with his harness set at maximum lift he hit the ground at the highest speed he could withstand. The Fireman probably intended going to the limit this time, leaving Hasson too disabled to prevent himself being smashed on impact. Getting rid of Inglis's body would not change that.

They had dropped almost two thousand meters and in just a few seconds would be penetrating the crowded commuter levels. The Fireman began to whoop with excitement, grinding himself against Hasson like a rutting dog. Holding Inglis with his left hand, Hasson used his right to loop the plasteel towline around the Fireman's upraised thigh and to pull it into a hard knot. He was still tightening the knot as they bombed down into the traffic flow. Lights flashed past nearby and suddenly the slow-spinning galaxy was above them. Patterns of street lamps blossomed beneath. This, Hasson knew, was close to the moment at which the Fireman had to break free if he was

to shed enough downward velocity before reaching ground level.

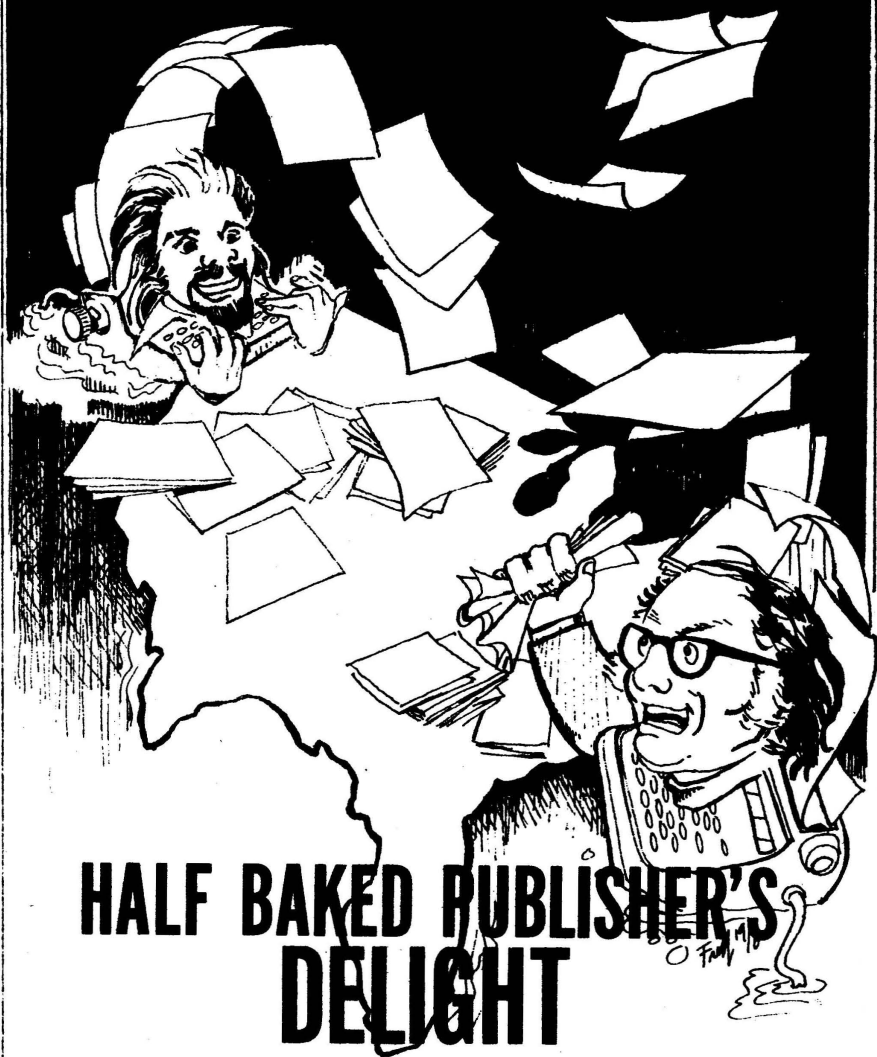
“Thanks for the ride,” the Fireman shouted, his voice ripping away in the slipstream. “Got to leave you soon.”

Hasson switched on his flares and then jerked the towline violently, bringing it to the Fireman's attention. The Fireman looked at the loop around his thigh. His body convulsed with shock as he made the discovery that it was he and not Hasson who was linked to the dead and deadly skycop. He pushed Hasson away and began to claw at the line. Hasson swam free in the wind, knowing that the line would resist even the Fireman's giant strength. As he felt his CG field spread its invisible wings he turned to look back. He saw the two bodies, one of them struggling frantically, pass beyond the range of his flares on their way to a lethal impact with the ground.

Hasson had no time to waste in introspection—his own crash landing was about to occur and it would require all his skill and experience to get him through it alive—but he was relieved to find that he could derive no satisfaction from the Fireman's death. Nunn and the others were wrong about him.

Even so, he thought, during the final hurtling seconds, I've hunted like a hawk for far too long. This is my last flight.

He prepared himself, unafraid, for the earth's blind embrace.



HALF BAKED PUBLISHER'S DELIGHT

JEFFREY S. HUDSON & ISAAC ASIMOV

PROLOGUE

Dear Isaac,

Enclosed is a short piece which I thought you might find amusing. Of course the resolution is a bit flawed, but, well . . . If you, Dr. A., *revised* the last three paragraphs or so, you would a) help create a Genuine Literary Curiosity, b) nudge a trufan over the line into the ranks of Published Writers, and c) blow said fan's mind clean out the window! You would also make me a very happy editor.

By the way, your *Forum* piece for *July Galaxy* is even perfecter than I expected!

All the best,
(signed) Jim Baen

Dear Jim,

Okay, here is all the stuff you sent me, together with an alternate ending that I made up.

Perhaps you can also get Bob Silverberg to make up an alternate ending—or at the very least make sure that he doesn't get mad. (*He didn't get mad. Ed.*)

And however much young J. S. Hudson may approve, I think it would be nice if you check with him, as a courtesy.

Naturally, I don't expect to be paid for this. If you run it, give all the money to Hudson.

Yours,
(signed) Isaac Asimov

Dear Jeff,

Would you mind having your story published as a collaboration with Dr. Isaac Asimov?

Best Regards,
(signed) Jim Baen

Dear Jim,

YOU'RE KIDDING!!! YES!!!

Incoherently yours,
(signed) Jeff Hudson

(End of Prologue)

A GURGLING boil shook the waters of New York Bay. The misty air swirled and parted, revealing a great metal curve lying low in the water. A few yards away the water thrashed, and a huge white slick floated to the surface. The Navy, Coast Guard, and NYPD rushed out to investigate. As the last fog cleared off, aerial photographs were taken by the Air Force and the TV networks.

The shiny metal curve rose slowly to a low peak, then dropped off quickly into the bay. It had a slight twist. All in all, it resembled a hump. The thrashing continued nearby, occasionally sending water plumes high into the air. The slick remained remarkably angular. The Pentagon couldn't make head nor

tail of it but assumed everyone that it wasn't the Russians.

Then it happened. As if something had been cut loose from below, the curve rose into the air, revealing itself to be a low arch, no, it didn't connect to anything on one end. Two huge marginal stops reared their heads above the waves, and abruptly it surfaced. Water poured from the platen, splashed in the carriage, cascaded down the keyes and the mighty typewriter rose into the sunlight. The huge type faces arched skyward and whacked against the paper, the tabulator key was pressed and the cylinder knobs raced through the air, knocking over the Statue of Liberty. On the back of the Mighty Machine read the legend "World's Most Prolific or Bust!"

And down among the keys, racing back and forth on a series of catwalks with a maniac fury, was Dr. Isaac Asimov.

The President was outraged.

The publisher was overjoyed.

The public was hysterical.

Meanwhile, the Good Doctor was typing away on an endless sheet of "paper" one hundred yards wide that seemed to materialize within the machine itself. Indeed, no part of the machine ever needed replacing, it seemed to be self-renewing. This included Doctor Asimov. The only clue to the typewriter's mysterious operation was a long electric cord that trailed out into the Atlantic.

Isaac pounded out his message twenty-four hours a day. His massive MS. had already clogged New York Harbor, and was now piling up on shore, curling around docks, gift wrapping high rises, paving the streets with the seemingly indestructable "paper". The letters did not blur or fade; whole crowds were seen walking down the paper pavement, reading in fascination.

The works were on every subject imaginable. Science: a new Theory of Relativity. Humor: The City of New York nearly died laughing. Fiction: A new trilogy (Science Fiction, of course).

The Mayor rowed out in a dinghy to try and talk Asimov into laying off for a while. Isaac listened to him, hitting the G, racing up underneath the Y, U, I, and pouncing on the O. He told the Mayor a funny joke and continued with his work.

Various other officials rowed out to plead with him but got nowhere. Friends and relatives, fellow scientists and writers, all attempted to dissuade him, but to no avail. He was offered immense sums of money and didn't even blink.

The Science Fiction Writers of America promised to give up their trade, en masse. No good. The World Science Fiction Convention offered him a special Hugo Award as "World's Greatest and Most Prolific Writer and Nicest Guy in the Cosmos." Fiddlesticks, said Asimov.

By now, the monstrous MS. had spread across New York State in a broad white swath—having the most interesting effect on Niagara Falls—crossed Lake Erie (if that didn't stop it, what could?) and tied Detroit in knots—literally.

AT ABOUT this time, a mighty roar, a colossal splash, and out of San Francisco Bay emerged yet another giant typewriter.

As the spray cleared, there stood the figure of Robert Silverberg, a dark glint in his eastward gazing eyes, water dripping from his long hair and beard. In his hand he held a long pole and he explained (while demonstrating) that by pole vaulting between the keys he expected to surpass Asimov.

Another set of type faces whacked twenty-four hours a day; once more, miles of indestructable MS. This time it was the Bay Bridge that got knocked over.

And so began the Great Race. Hank Aaron was forgotten overnight, and the Americans, being a sporting people, started rooting for one or the other. Attempts at placation were abandoned—for what one-of-a-kind honor could be granted twice? However, lesser honors rained down, in order to show affection and confidence in one or the other of the two. Silverberg was voted Best Dressed Science Fiction Writer. Asimov turned down a presidential bid. Neither bothered more than a blink with all the silly

business and continued typing at a tremendous pace. Asimov, in order to speed up production, created a Tarzanic arrangements so he could swing from key to key. But in so doing, he lost valuable time to Silverberg, whose pole vaulting was exquisite.

Asimov's MS. had by now crossed the Mississippi and was currently burying Mount Rushmore. Silverberg's, after some initial difficulties in the Grand Canyon, was ram-paging into the Great Plains.

Then, for reasons unbeknownst to man, the two MSS. changed direction and proceeded on a collision course. It became apparent that this blessed event would occur in the Cornhusker State of Nebraska. Many bets were placed on the outcome of the meeting of the minds. The Big Question was "Which is stronger?!"

Publishers cashed in on the free publicity, printing and reprinting as cleaned out book stores demanded more and more. Huge fan clubs were formed, offering fake beards and wigs (just like Silverberg's!) Asimov's fans tended to dress as robots, wearing "Mule-ears" for less formal occasions.

ALTERNATE CONCLUSION TO
"HALF BAKED
PUBLISHER'S DELIGHT"

The big day came. The two paper snakes approached, raised their heads, and coiled together into a spiral.

For a day, they held together trembling in a double helix of paper, while more paper accumulated beneath. Then the two coils drew apart, peeling away, and out of the air molecules about, each formed a new coil of paper. Where one double helix had existed a while before, two now existed in perfect replication.

Reporters dropped their microphones.

Government agents dropped their listening devices.

The American public dropped its collective lower jaw.

Another day the two double helices held together trembling, then drew apart, peeling away—and there were four.

In the Atlantic and in the Pacific, each endless sheaf of paper pulled out of the gigantic typewriter with a horrendous tear. The keys of each locked in place with a thunderous snap. Asimov fell back, gibbering. Silverberg tumbled forward, yammering.

In Nebraska, the paper helices continued to separate and replicate. The monster no longer needed its Frankensteins.

NASA estimates that in less than two months, all the Earth will be paper. Perhaps it will then reach for the Moon.

HAVING TROUBLE FINDING GALAXY OR
WORLDS OF IF? SEND US YOUR NEWS
DEALER'S NAME AND ADDRESS—

*We'll make him
an offer he can't
REFUSE*

(like a free rack-program, maybe)



Send to:
Jay Tunick, Circulation Director
Galaxy and If
235 E. 45th Street
New York, N. Y. 10017

EDITORIAL

ON THE URBANIZATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

A few months ago I had occasion to attend the Northeastern U.S. SF Convention (BOSKONE) where I had the good fortune to hear a talk on space flight reaction-drives given by Dr. Robert Enzmann, a physicist working at Northeast Cryonics, Inc. In this talk Dr. Enzmann discussed in nuts-and-bolts terms the construction of a vehicle capable of making the round-trip to Pluto in under eight weeks. He was not talking about "theoretical innovations just over the horizon of today's technology," but of (relatively) simple Apollo-style R&D; the mating of shuttlecraft technology with the results of vacuum-based pulse-fusion research. I should also mention that Dr. Enzmann was referring to vehicles of virtually any size payload-capacity and payload-costs in the range of pennies-per-pound at point of delivery.

During the question-and-answer session that followed I asked Dr. Enzmann, "If you were to be given—today—five billion dollars and the Directorship of NASA, how long would it take you to achieve an operational pulse-fusion driven space vehicle with the performance characteristics you describe?" Dr. Enzmann replied very simply: "Three to five years." Given a more ordinary course of events, he told me, we can expect to have such vehicles within 10 to 15 years.

A month or so later I was discussing possible science-fiction articles with science-writer Dick Hoagland (who has been, among other things, Science Advisor to Walter Cronkite, Project Scientist to the first woman to fly solo across the North Pole, and one of the creators of the so-called Pioneer-10 plague) when I discovered to my delight, that he and Dr. Enzmann are old friends. One result of this discovery was a two-part science feature, done in the form of a dialogue, entitled TORCHSHIPS NOW! The conversation therein depicted, while obviously highly edited, did in essence take place one cold New England night, or on a succession of such nights. The other result was that, as of this issue, Dick is Science Editor of *Worlds of IF*.

WELCOME, DICK!

—BAEN

Out of the cradle endlessly accelerating . . .

TORCHSHIPS NOW!

**ROBERT D. ENZMANN &
RICHARD C. HOAGLAND**

I

IT is a setting reasonably improbable for the discussion of a breakthrough which is destined to change Civilization. We are in the living room of the first author of this narrative, a room furnished in Danish Modern, lots of children, and an insatiable fireplace from which protrudes a seven-foot log. It is evening and the curtains are drawn, creating a sense of cloister from the world outside while the talk within ranges the Universe . . .

We are a sizeable group, some sitting on chairs, some on the floor, the second author of this article balancing the irrepressible Heidi Enzmann (eight years) on one knee while attempting, simultaneously, to balance a cup of tea on the other. In a corner of the long couch, Bob's

wife, Josie—mathematician extraordinaire—is quietly sitting doing needlepoint; a couple of unexpected drop-in guests from a commune in Vermont, the children, and our host complete the group.

Strategically positioned beside the hearth (on which old toothpaste tubes are in the process of being magically transformed into lead soldiers) is the head of this unusual household—geologist, explorer, historian, physicist, project engineer, and dreamer—looking comfortable, albeit a bit drafty about the knees, in a *very* faded pair of ancient blue denim bermudas and a somewhat lumpy woolen pullover.

Periodically, adjustment is made to the contents of the fireplace. The ritual consists of shoving in another foot or so of the long log protruding into the room, and adding various

other ingredients to encourage combustion, such as the contents of many wastebaskets which appear from other rooms. (The entire house is a warren of desk corners and bookshelves—in the hallways, in bedrooms, the basement, up under the eaves.)

HOAGLAND: Robert, you and I have shared a unique privilege in being on the inside of events which have played a key role in shaping the future history of this planet. In fact, you have enjoyed a few more years of privilege than I by virtue of the fact that you started sooner. Ignoring that unfair advantage for the moment, we've experienced the latest of these turning points—the Space Age—and have even managed to raise a little dust over its importance, here and there. But here is a question: where did we fail?

Kidding aside, what went wrong? The human race has dreamed of leaving Earth all the way back to Lucian of Samasatos. I'd even be willing to bet that someone in the crowd which spent a sizeable percentage of its GNP on Stonehenge may have wondered if the moon, instead of being a god, wasn't another world. The dream is old!

And yet, here we are, with six flags standing on the surface of another planet, a bevy of craft sending back fantastic pictures of places that we have known all our lives only as points of light in the sky, with even a message on its way to

the "galactics," whoever and where ever they may be . . .

ENZMANN: Inspired by you . . . [*Dick has been referred to as a "midwife of the Pioneer 10 plaque."* BAEN]

HOAGLAND: Partly, yes. Yet, in spite of all this accomplishment and effort and physical return, the reaction to this amazing series of miracles is, "So what?" Where did we go wrong?

Hundreds of thousands of people avidly read science fiction, are turned on about the Future, and there is even a growing number who feel, however misguidedly, that the planets are somehow involved with their daily lives and where they are going or have come from. What happened to this diverse base of support for space travel? Where and when did it evaporate?

I CAN TELL you how we lost them, the great American public. We failed through success. We were too perfect: not a man was lost in space. That was the first factor. I was in space headquarters at CBS during the Flight of Apollo 13. The world hung on every breath, every creak of the aluminum foil skin of the LM as it fell back toward Earth, running out of power, out of water, freezing cold, unable to perform even simple navigation. Would they incinerate on re-entry from too steep an angle, or would they skip off into deep space to die of suffocation? Lovell's determined line

against the omnipresent static of air-to-ground, "... better to bias it for a steeper angle than to skip. We're all agreed up here ... we're coming home!"

The world ate it up: the networks, the newspapers, the wire services, and the public. The whole planet, more people than had ever cared for three human beings in the entire history of the earth, literally "rode" that spacecraft back from the jaws of death. They cared. It wasn't a horrible spectator sport such as you see in some dramatic life-and-death events, like the guy on a ledge where somebody shouts, "Jump!" No; it was everyone's jeopardy and in the end we all shared the victory. The telegrams, the phone calls, the letters—all indicated a deep concern, a recognition that these guys were in deep trouble. The messages poured in: offerings of advice, of aid and money for the wives, anything to help in a time of need. Underlying it all, moreover, was something much more significant, something which made me realize where we in the space business went wrong.

Apollo 13 occurred in the aftermath of the brilliant and redundant successes of Apollos 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. There was a wave of reaction building, spelled out in the phrase, "... all that money, for a bunch of *rocks*?" Space appropriations, particularly the money allocated for Apollos 18, 19, and 20, had just then been, or were about

to be, cut. Ecology was big and growing as the new national preoccupation. But ...

When three guys, engaged in "a wasteful, silly, and horribly expensive use of public money" found themselves in severe and highly visible jeopardy, with about an even chance of buying it halfway between Earth and the moon; the first, possibly, to sacrifice their lives in space, the effect was magical.

Not one commentator, editorial, or story that I saw during or after that interminable wait for their return suggested that they were about to, or would have died, in vain. They were bona fide heroes, giving their lives (if the worst happened) while engaged in an activity which was to advance the entire human race. Or so the reaction seemed to imply. Even people who were not extraordinarily articulate seemed to have a gut feeling that these guys were important, that their dying or danger of dying *meant* something. Not even the severest critics of the space program accused the Apollo 13 crew of throwing away their lives on a pointless exercise.

This drama of a real confrontation with possible death in space, rather than causing a backlash against the value of space exploration, seemed to bring out the hidden feelings of an awful lot of people that these guys were important because, somehow, they were working for a tomorrow for all of us.

The price of winning the moon, rather than being too high, wasn't high enough. Our conquest of another world was not paid for by the life of a single flying astronaut. And, as a human measure of value, was therefore a "cheap" thrill. After all, when you're spending billions, who counts the money? Contrast these 20 billions (total cost) to get to the moon with the 27 millions *per day* for approximately ten years (80 billions) for military expenditure in one area, alone; and add to this cost, for the same fateful decade, the enormous expenditure of life in that area. Yes, we acquired the face of Luna far too easily to value its potential.

Factor Number Two: We discovered a dead solar system, a system with an overwhelming tendency toward one morphological structure, craters. Craters and more craters; big craters, small craters; craters with rays and craters without rays; craters on what we had hoped was life-filled Mars; craters, of course, on the moon; craters under the forever veiling clouds of Venus, and craters, also, smothering the surface of a planet no human eye had ever seen—Mercury. Too many craters and too little prospect for living things in the rest of the sun's family helped to kill interest in space. Particularly those craters on Mars.

Mars, as a bigger version of the lifeless moon, was probably the *coup de grace* to public interest in

exploring the solar system. By the time the exciting, wonderful news was relayed back by *Mariner 9* that Mars was apparently a world asleep, locked in a glacial age awaiting the warmth of a 50,000 year old spring to awaken it, it was too late. Nobody was listening.

Factor Number Three involved technical necessity. Space travel was too exclusive. NASA was forced to pick as astronauts guys with tolerances, reflexes, and piloting skills that make the rest of us look like rejects from the Pleiocene. In any human activity where only a very limited number can directly participate it is important to establish an identification of the audience with the participants. Who can relate to Superman?

Of necessity, the beginning of spaceflight built up the image of an extraordinarily dangerous, very exclusive activity which was unlikely ever to be a profession open to the "average" person. And who, at that point, wanted it, with exquisite delights ranging all the way from exploding to drowning or being crushed to death during re-entry if you were able to qualify?

American interest in the space program was killed, then by a combination of boredom, disappointment, and eliteism. Even for science fiction fans it was hard to imagine space opening up very soon to the average Joe. Oh, and one more thing: spaceflight was a *public* expenditure. In the minds of the pub-

lic, it was money spent on one thing which couldn't be spent on something else. And as long as there were other deserving programs in need of the "large sums" NASA was apparently receiving, even its supporters had to accent the immediate, practical benefits from space research. However—as we know—space is a *long-term* investment, equivalent in many ways to our remote emergence from the sea, 600 million years ago. Try selling *that* to a budget director at the General Accounting Office!

Now that is all past.

What of the present? Alas, as I see it, from about ten years of growing up with, in, and through the space program, Americans actually feel that our space explorations are essentially at an end. One very well-known TV space reporter was heard to remark recently, that "all the excitement is gone from space exploration. All that's left now is to put up a few earth satellites to work on inventorying our dwindling resources!"

ALL THIS is about to change. And you, Robert, are partially responsible. Tell us what is about to happen to turn this dismal state of affairs completely around!

ENZMANN: Simple. Mankind, in its current awareness of a fossil fuel energy crisis, is about to tame the first inexhaustible resource in its history—the power of the stars—thermonuclear fusion. When that

happens, sometime around 1976, we (those of us who see beyond the enormous immediate benefit to Earth) will use this energy as the means of opening up total exploration and development of the solar system to all levels of society. And some of us, myself among them, look even *beyond* our solar system, to the stars themselves!

For the first time, aerospace, rather than being the source of spin-off benefits to the culture, will be the recipient. The greatly accelerated attention and funding of various thermonuclear fusion programs due to national awareness of an energy "crisis" will result in the creation of fusion rocket-engines with efficiencies and capabilities which will seem almost magical to those raised on chemical rocket technology.

This *must* happen. It is inevitable. As long as there is funding of fusion research and development for the unlimited generation of electric power, there will be, simultaneously, development of fusion rocket systems. As this development progresses—years before we have a practical means of generating electricity from fusion—we shall have crude fusion rockets (probably in the late '70's or early '80's) created as "by-products" of the main objective, which is unlimited power for our terrestrial society. With fusion rockets and the Torchships of Robert Heinlein's prophetic imagination, the skies

are literally opened to acquisition of the solar system and the stars.

HOAGLAND: Then the key to the future of space lies in the funding levels for fusion, made by the U.S. Energy Office, now! . . .

ENZMANN: . . . and in the awareness of every environmentalist that, directly and indirectly, fusion power will result in a restoration of the green garden, Earth.

HOAGLAND: How many do you think are aware of what is about to happen, both to our energy needs here and in the extraterrestrial context?

ENZMANN: Too few. This is still a society in which you can achieve almost any objective, provided you *know* what you want and are aware of *how* to go about attaining it. Too few people realize how close we are to the solution of this, perhaps, ultimate technical goal: unlimited, pollutionless energy; or of what is application, particularly in the area of spaceflight will mean, even within a few years of tonight.

HOAGLAND: This is incredible.

ENZMANN: But there is even more to come. It seems probable that, as research progresses in the construction of practical fusion power plants, there will come a point where the Energy Office and NASA seek some sort of cooperative liaison. That is, beyond a certain point, research and development of fusion technology might just be more economical if carried

out *in space*, in near earth orbit, rather than on the ground.

Without going into elaborate detail on the history of fusion research in the United States over the last twenty years, suffice to say there has been slow but steady progress. The primary stumbling blocks have been in heating and confining a plasma composed of electrically neutral ionised electrons and nuclei within chambers which have to be almost perfect vacuums before, during, and *after* the reaction. The very nature of a fusion reaction tends to mess up a vacuum chamber with a quantity of non-essential plasma. And in all approaches, a good—*ultra*-good—vacuum is one absolutely essential element in attaining fusion.

Now, down here, under our ever-present sea of air, making and holding good vacuum is only a little bit easier than balancing the Federal budget—and almost as expensive. It seems a good bet, as developmental hardware gets bigger and usable power levels grow, that someone is going to take an HP-35 or Bomar (or even an old-fashioned slide rule) and discover that an economical fusion electrical power plant doesn't belong on the surface of the earth, at all.

And that will leave space as the solution.

HOAGLAND: Right. We have an energy crisis looking for a solution. Waiting in the wings is solution with a capital "S"—namely,

thermonuclear fusion energy which will ultimately be brought on line for electrical power applications within twenty years.

ENZMANN: Ah . . . yes.

HOAGLAND: In addition to other interim energy solutions, fusion research is currently being funded and will increase as the years roll by. O.K. At some point it is realized that practical fusion plants require testing in really good vacuums . . . no, are more economical in an environment where an unlimited vacuum is always available.

Also by the end of this decade—sooner if funding can be increased—the Shuttle will be on line. We marry the Shuttle with the fusion research and development, and we get, long before a commercial electrical generator powered by a fusion-reactor . . .

ENZMANN: . . . the first fusion rocket systems! Power-system tests conducted in near Earth orbit demonstrate the ease and economy of propelling spacecraft via fusion technology. In fact, it seems probable that before 1980 a fusion-engine powered probe will be launched in this manner. The Era of the Torchship will have dawned.

HOAGLAND: And we are so close, a few years, a decade. What's that, compared to the history of the dream?

ENZMANN: The distance between the fabric-covered aircraft of the 30's and the magnificent Apollo

Project is surely greater than the distance between the first manned expedition to the Moon and the first voyage to the stars.

To say that, is one thing. But to realize, that because of the explosion of effort going on in this area I shall probably live to see it is another . . . *And it is wonderful!*

THE FIRE needed tending. How many hearths had been ringed at night across the span of human consciousness by how many generations of storytellers? Each with an audience, each with a tale, each lighted by the flickering warmth of Man's first Promethian accomplishment. And now, so soon, the fire of the Universe itself, the thermonuclear inferno of a captive star would be loosed to warm how many future generations of future storytellers assembled . . . where? One thing was certain: some of them would be a long way from this quiet New England town of Lexington, Massachusetts. History is full of ironies. Once before, this had been the setting for a shot heard round the world.

ENZMANN: To give appropriate perspective to this development several things should be considered. The first is the ever-growing availability of goods and services, a growth which, even in my lifetime, has been spectacular. I remember the clip-clop of horses in the streets of Bath, Maine. I remember blacksmiths. I can still recapture the

wonder of running out to see an automobile. Can you imagine how many "blacksmiths" it would have taken to create just one of the cars out there on the driveway, cars which have carried one of you almost a hundred miles this evening, and you two all the way from Northern Vermont? We take the automobile for granted. Those who cannot afford one, even a small one, we somehow think of as underprivileged. And yet, consider the wealth necessary to own just one car, let alone create the tens of millions sold each year in the United States alone.

The exploration of space is considered an expensive luxury today by some. But expense is relative. Even now we are spending less than one percent of our GNP on this activity, and already the return, in the form of satellite communications systems, earth resources information, and basic new science, has more than paid for the initial expenditure.

Any human activity which results in an increase of productivity must be considered a source and not a sink, as space has erroneously been viewed by some. When we think of spaceships and their cost in the future, we must think, not only of the generally rising wealth of the world, but also of the sharply rising contribution to this wealth which will be made by those ships and the space effort as a whole.

Wealth comes down to three

basic things: energy, resources, and information. With successful control of the first (fusion), the second item (resources) becomes almost academic. Fusion power will allow refining of ores which are now too poor to be profitable. And with fusion the recycling of anything is literally as easy as shoving the item into the 100,000,000 degree plasma, and magnetically separating out each isotope in pure form, for use again.

But it is the third item, information, which is our *real* wealth. Our total science, our technological "how-to" bank, is also increasing at a phenomenal rate all over the world. It is "know-how" which will allow us to focus the previous two items, energy and resources, on the alleviation of human need and the meeting of rising world aspirations.

The true value of the space effort during the past 15 years has been in the expansion of that "how-to" data base for future operations. We have acquired data which includes basic new information on the planets; the technology of space systems (how hardware "lives" in the space environment); and the capabilities of Man—how *he* lives and performs in space and on another planet. Now, imagine where we would stand if, suddenly, armed with a fusion drive, we had to discover or acquire all this data "overnight."

HOAGLAND: There are those who believe, even with the space

shuttle, that America's era of space exploration is over, that we have witnessed the last excitement of men walking on another world and of pictures relayed back from places no human eye had ever seen before. What you are describing is the veritable lull before the storm, the micro-shock before the earthquake, the hush just before the blinding light of another dawn . . .

ENZMANN: It is the dawn. Mankind is about to emerge from its long night of infancy into the steady sunlight that forever fills the vast spaces of the solar system. It is the beginning of our first new day amid the wonders of the sun. A further part of our perspective should be historical. There are ideas which have their times and this is usually because they make economic sense. Many people bemoan the end of the Apollo Project; they shouldn't, any more than they mourn the passing of Gemini, Mercury, or the propeller-driven aircraft which took 14 noisy hours to cross the Atlantic. Systems develop. In any such endeavors, there are false starts, premature starts, blind alleys, and restarts. Look at the zeppelin, the DOX flying boat, floating islands proposed in the '30's to aid trans-atlantic air service and, perhaps, current techniques for cryogenic suspension of "chrononauts."

It is not the systems that are important. They are like species blown before the winds of evolu-

tion. It is only objectives which matter in the long run. My background is technological and limited. It is currently directed toward the practical realization of electrical power generation through the achievement of thermonuclear fusion. My avocation and dearest wish is to see that power applied to the realization of manned starships. It has been my dream for decades; a dream which, at last, seems to be on the verge of realization.

HOAGLAND: I can't help thinking that we are roughly equivalent, historically speaking, to that period just before general acceptance of the Copernican world view. There are a lot of people, in fact, I would venture to say *most* people, who view space activities as a trivial government activity, harmless at best, wasteful of taxpayers' money at worst; but totally disconnected from our lives and the future of our planet. In terms of consciousness, we aren't actually in the Space Age at all, yet!

ENZMANN: We are all prisoners of our perspectives on the world. To most people, spaceflight is the Apollo Project, complete with its gargantuan facilities, its spectacular departures, and its incredible price tag. No wonder that, in the public mind, spaceflight is an expensive luxury. Even those more sophisticated may have difficulty in putting into appropriate context

the promise of recent developments. Therefore, it may be relevant to consider some alternate space transportation systems and their relative merits.

To make things interesting, let us normalize all systems against the ultimate technical problem: flight to the stars.

Chemical Rockets. Transit times to the nearer stars, several light years distant: 4,000 years (186 miles/sec) to 400 years (1860 miles/sec)

[Interstellar probes could conceivably be attempted with chemical systems, although the size, complexity, and quantity of propellant would beggar the imagination. As reference, we *have* sent forth our first interstellar emissaries, *Pioneers 10* and *11*. *Pioneer 10* will transit the interstellar gulf at about 7 miles/sec, with a flight time of about 80,000 years to the distance of the nearest star (toward which, incidentally, it is not targeted). Not much scaling is necessary to see that a chemical flight to Proxima Centuri with a huge generation ship, while possible, is the least likely way in which we'll make "the crossing."]

Ion Propulsion. Transit times of 3,000 to 200 years: velocities comparable to those of chemical systems

[The advantage of ion systems lies in the enormous increase of efficiency with an associated decrease in the amount of propellant and,

therefore, associated tankage, etc. When all the trade-offs are figured in, however, total trip time is about the same as with chemical rockets: your "world" is simply smaller and more manageable.]

At this point, a footnote might be in order: No matter what the propulsion mechanism, with flight times of the order of centuries, it is obvious that the most severe problems for the intrepid voyagers is not propulsion but power. How do you heat an artificial world trillions of miles from the nearest heat source? How do you run computers, lights, air conditioning, sensors, and life support equipment, in general? Batteries? Even assuming fuel cells similar to those which powered the Service Module in Apollo, stop for a moment and just think of the amount of electrical energy and fuel required to keep a ship operating for 3,000 years!

It is apparent that serious consideration of starflight was not in the cards until the discovery of atomic energy. And at that technical plateau, if you're going to use the atom to produce electricity for accelerating charged ions to thrust a ship toward the stars, it becomes obvious that a more direct utilization of atomic energy might just make things a lot simpler. Could you, for instance, harness the ravaging power of a fission chain reaction in a rocket engine, thus producing a true "atomic rocket," for

a starship capable of actually visiting our neighboring suns in this galactic sector?

The answer is: We tried.

Nuclear Pulse Propulsion. Transit times of 500 to 40 years: velocities up to 1/10 speed of light.

[Back in the days of *Sputnik*, when the name of the game was mass and brute force, a concept was developed for propelling space-ships that was compelling in its simplicity. It was named *Orion*, and it died in 1961 on the eve of handing mankind the solar system. *Orion* was based on the apparently insane premise that the way to harness atomic energy in a rocket engine was to build a large ship and detonate a small atomic bomb in the chamber. What, at first glance, looked as if the design engineers needed a month or two under psychiatric care, turned out to be supremely workable in practice. The key was scale.]

Small "mini-fission" bombs were to be exploded inside a large, reinforced rocket chamber, open at one end—reminiscent of a pot-bellied stove—and attached across a series of shock absorbers to the payload section, crew quarters, and control section of the ship. Exploded at the rate of one per second, the thrust of the expanding plasma escaping from the nozzle would propel the ship forward at between .1 and one "G." (32 feet/sec². None of this coasting nonsense; none of the hun-

dreds of days drifting to Mars or Venus.) Later versions did away with the chamber, substituting a flat steel plate. The nuclear charges, shaped to direct the plasma toward the plate, were to be ejected behind the ship and detonated in a manner and at a rate similar to the chamber version.

For those who have visions of pusher plate, ship, and crew being turned into a small nova upon the captain's order to get underway, stop and think. In space, as on earth, the actual nuclear explosion lasts only *millionths* of a second. The first thing to hit the plate would have been the X-rays generated by the fission process. (To get light you have to have the step-down effect of an atmosphere. No fireballs and mushroom clouds out there.) The X-rays absorbed by the plate would cause heating. Later, at much less than the speed of light, the primary energy transport mechanism of the bomb, the high temperature plasma of what used to be the uranium, the steel casing, triggering, circuits, etc., would hit the plate. It is this plasma impact that drives the ship forward. It also causes heating. But the sum of these two energy inputs to the plate, on calculation, is *less* than the energy necessary to heat, melt, and vaporize anything as massive and conducting as the pusher plates contemplated. And remember: at the rate of one explosion per second, the plate would have a *million*

times longer to cool, to radiate away excess energy, than the rate of input! It is quite analogous to the game of passing your finger through a candle flame. There is a rate at which you could do it all day. Simply a matter of calculation.

The importance of this direct application of atomic fission to space propulsion was staggering. Test models, using dynamite charges in place of nuclear explosives, worked beautifully. Shock absorbing systems, necessary to smooth out the percussive effect of a series of impulses to the plate, were designed and tested. The entire idea was actually quite similar to that of an internal combustion engine, where a series of individual explosions in cylinders are forced to impart an even flow of power to the drive mechanism of the automobile.

The potential of *Orion* is hard to underestimate. Ships were designed that could have made a manned Mars flight with 1,000 tons of supplies and 60 men, in three weeks! A hundred tons of samples, with crew, could have been returned in similar time. Another version could have made a manned flight to Pluto, with 30 men and 50 tons of supplies, in *four weeks!* Five tons of samples and crew could have come home in another month. Such a trip with chemical rockets similar to the *Saturn V* would take 45 years for a direct flight, one way.

HOAGLAND: Let me under-

stand this: *Orion* was a project funded by NASA, the Department of Defense, and several segments of private industry. It was examined, hardware built, models of the basic concept tested (explosive propulsion with a shock-averaging mechanism), and projected mission specs written which would essentially have opened the solar system to us within a couple of decades, starting in the . . .

ENZMANN: . . . late '50's.

HOAGLAND: And it was cancelled?

ENZMANN: Technically, *Orion* was sensational. Politically, it had one flaw: it required detonation of atomic bombs in space, an activity which we were anxiously seeking to detect and prevent, at that time. *Orion* became the prime casualty of the Test-ban Treaty with the U.S.S.R. History will decide which was more important to the future of the world—the first retreat from nuclear confrontation, evidenced by the Treaty, or the early acquisition of the solar system which *Orion* would have made possible. It is conceivable that *Orion* could have lessened the pressure for nuclear war by providing men access to the treasures of the solar system. It is just as conceivable that the nation producing such interplanetary craft could have dominated Earth, in which case war might have occurred in an attempt to prevent that political eventuality. We are treading on speculative ground

which I am not qualified to explore, much less provide detailed maps thereof.

ORION could have made an interstellar transit at velocities appreciably close to that of light, up to one-third "C." The higher velocities would have been used in simple fly-by missions, which are inherently much less expensive in terms of energy and fuel than capture missions. (You don't have to decelerate.) Communications, even in the late '50's, would have presented no insurmountable difficulty, considering the mass we had to work with. It was estimated that simple TV frames could be returned from a depth of 250 light-years, using then-existent equipment. Reliability and multiple redundancy were more of a problem for long missions lasting several decades. Remember, at that time we were studying unmanned interstellar probes that could easily reach their destinations within a single experimenter's lifetime.

Orion had one other flaw. The ships themselves would have resembled boiler-plate freighters, and would have cost about the same (about a dollar per pound), which is way below current costs for aerospace vehicles. No, the expense of *Orion* was in its fuel. Atomic bombs even little ones, cost a lot of money to produce. Now, with breeder reactors that will produce surplus plutonium as a by-product of ef-

forts to generate electricity, the cost of making the "bomblets" would probably be a tenth of what it was twenty years ago.]

Here, Dr. Enzmann leaned forward to mend the fire. It flickered upward, sending sparks up the chimney and a warm light shone for a moment or two into his ordinarily austere and aquiline-featured countenance. The softening effect of the firelight matched his next musing words, the words of the creator spoken to his lost creation..

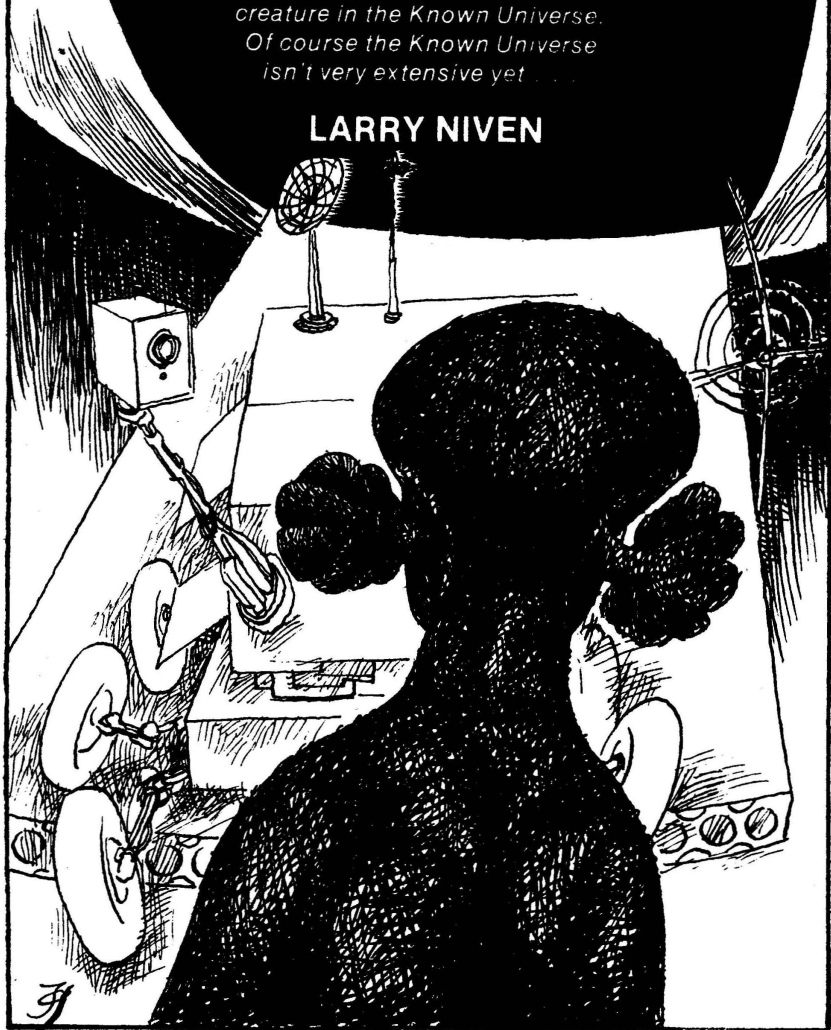
"Alas, *Orion*, I loved you, and have been essentially alone in publicizing your existence. Instead of you, we've had Apollo—a safer course, perhaps, but not as grand. Across the years, when it was unpopular to mention your name, I lauded your abilities, such was my devotion to the idea that there existed an actual concept which could take men, en mass, beyond the earth. It was not the wisest of political decisions, but it was honest. How ironic that many of those who assisted at your birth, *Orion*, should now be in pursuit of an even grander means to that objective—fusion—and all that it implies. The torch has now passed to your successor, but you will be remembered by some of us as the first. Man's earliest expression of an age-old longing in the night to reach out across the dark and touch the stars!"

TO BE CONTINUED

PLAYTHING

*Man is the meanest, toughest, orneriest
creature in the Known Universe.
Of course the Known Universe
isn't very extensive yet . . .*

LARRY NIVEN



THE children were playing six-point Overlord, hopping from point to point over a hexagonal diagram drawn in the sand, when the probe broke atmosphere over their heads. They might have sensed it then, for it was heating fast as it entered atmosphere; but nobody happened to look up.

Seconds later the retrorocket fired.

A gentle rain of infrared light bathed the limonite sands. Over hundreds of square miles of orange martian desert, wide-spaced clumps of black grass uncurled their leaves to catch and hoard the heat. Tiny sessile things buried beneath the sand raised fan-shaped probes.

The children hadn't noticed yet, but their ears were stirring. Their ears sensed heat rather than sound; unless they were listening to some heat source, they usually remained folded like silver flowers against the children's heads. Now they uncurled, flowers blooming, showing black centers; now they twitched and turned, seeking. One turned and saw it.

A point of white light high in the east, slowly setting.

The children talked to each other in coded pulses of heat, opening and closing their mouths to show the warm interiors.

Hey!

What is it?

Let's go see!

They hopped off across the limonite sand, forgetting the Overlord

game, racing the meet the falling thing.

IT WAS down when they got there and still shouting-hot. The probe was big, as big as a dwelling, a fat cylinder with a rounded roof above and a great hot mouth beneath. Black and white paint in a checker-board pattern gave it the look of a giant's toy. It rested on three comically splayed metal legs ended in wide, circular feet.

The children began rubbing against the metal skin, flashing pulses of contentment as they absorbed the heat.

The probe trembled. Motion inside. The children jumped back, stood looking at each other, each ready to run if the others did. None wanted to be first. Suddenly it was too late. One whole curved wall of the probe dropped outward and thudded to the sand.

A child crawled out from underneath, rubbing his head and flashing heat from his mouth: words he shouldn't have learned yet. The wound in his scalp steamed briefly before the edges pulled shut.

The small, intense white sun, halfway down the sky, cast opaque black shadow across the opening in the probe. In the shadow something stirred.

The children watched, awed.

ABEL paused in the opening, then rolled out, using the slab of re-entry shielding as a ramp. ABEL

was a cluster of plastic and metal widgetry mounted on a low platform slung between six balloon tires. When it reached the sand it hesitated as if uncertain, then rolled out onto Mars, jerkily, feeling its way.

The child who'd been bumped by the ramp hopped over to kick the moving thing. ABEL stopped at once. The child shied back.

Suddenly an adult stood among them.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Nothing, one answered.

Just playing, said another.

WELL, BE CAREFUL WITH IT. The adult looked like the twin of any of the six children. The roof of his mouth was warmer than theirs—but the authority in his voice was due to more than mere loudness. **SOMEONE MAY HAVE GONE TO GREAT TROUBLE TO BUILD THIS OBJECT.**

Yes sir.

Somewhat subdued, the children gathered around the Automated Biological Laboratory. They watched a door open in the side of the drum-shaped container that made up half of ABEL's body. A gun inside the door fired a weighted line high into the air.

That thing almost hit me.

Serves you right.

The line, coated with sand and dust, came slithering back into ABEL's side. One of the children licked it and found it covered with something sticky and tasteless.

Two children climbed onto the slow-moving platform, then up onto the cylinder. They stood up and waved their arms, balancing precariously on flat triangular feet. ABEL swerved toward a clump of black grass, and both children toppled to the sand. One picked himself up and ran to climb on again.

The adult watched it all dubiously.

A second adult appeared beside him.

YOU ARE LATE. WE HAD AN APPOINTMENT TO XATBNORNEN CHIP. HAD YOU FORGOTTEN?

I HAD. THE CHILDREN HAVE FOUND SOMETHING.

SO THEY HAVE. WHAT IS IT DOING?

IT WAS TAKING SOIL SAMPLES AND PERHAPS TRYING TO COLLECT SPORES. NOW IT SHOWS AN INTEREST IN GRASS. I WONDER HOW ACCURATE ITS INSTRUMENTS ARE.

IF IT WERE SENTIENT IT WOULD SHOW INTEREST IN THE CHILDREN.

PERHAPS.

ABEL stopped. A box at the front lifted on a telescoping leg and began a slow pan of the landscape. From the low dark line of the Mare Acidalium highlands on the north-eastern horizon, it swung around until its lens faced straight backward at the empty orange desert of

Tracus Albus. At this point the lens was eye to eye with the hitchhiking child. The child flapped his ears, made idiot faces, shouted nonsense words, and flicked at the lens with his long tongue.

THAT SHOULD GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT WHO WOULD YOU SAY SENT IT?

EARTH, I WOULD THINK. NOTICE THE SILICATE DISC IN THE CAMERA. TRANSPARENT TO THE FREQUENCIES OF LIGHT MOST LIKELY TO PENETRATE THAT PLANET'S THICK ATMOSPHERE.

AGREEMENT.

The gun fired again, into the black grass, and the line began to reel back. Another box retracted its curved lid. The hitchhiker peered into it, while the other children watched admiringly from below.

One of the adults shouted, **GET BACK, YOU YOUNG PLANT-BRAIN!**

The child turned to flap his ears at him. At that moment ABEL flashed a tight ruby beam of laser light just past his ear. For an instant it showed, an infinite length of neon tubing against the navy blue-sky.

The child scrambled down and ran for his life.

EARTH IS NOT IN THAT DIRECTION, an adult observed.

YET THE BEAM MUST HAVE BEEN A MESSAGE. SOMETHING IN ORBIT, PERHAPS?

THE ALIEN CRITIC



An Informal & Irreverent Science Fiction & Fantasy Journal

**Edited & Published by
Richard E. Geis**

Discover why Richard E. Geis has won 3 Hugo Awards and been Nominated 7 times!

*** Blare of Trumpets*
Columnist: John Brunner**

Read issue #9 and see Robert A. Heinlein dissected mercilessly, psychologically and culturally, by Alexei and Cory Panshin in their 13,000 words of "Reading Heinlein Subjectively."

Read issue #9 and return to the dear, lively days of the pulps with Sam Merwin, Jr. (former editor of STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES) in his "Written to a Pulp!"

Enjoy Geis editorials, commentary, reviews, letters from high-powered (& low-powered) pros and fans.

**Quarterly/sample \$1
year \$4/two yrs. \$7**

**THE ALIEN CRITIC
P. O. Box 11408
Portland, OR 98211**

The adults looked skyward. Presently their eyes adjusted.

ON THE INNER MOON. DO YOU SEE IT?

YES. QUITE LARGE . . . AND WHAT ARE THOSE MIDGES IN MOTION ABOUT IT? THAT IS NO AUTOMATED PROBE, BUT A VEHICLE. I THINK WE MUST EXPECT VISITORS SOON.

WE SHOULD HAVE INFORMED THEM OF OUR PRESENCE LONG AGO. A LARGE RADIO-FREQUENCY LASER WOULD HAVE DONE IT.

WHY SHOULD WE DO ALL THE WORK WHEN THEY HAVE ALL THE METALS, THE SUNLIGHT, THE RESOURCES?

Having finished with the clump of grass, ABEL lurched into motion and rolled toward a dark line of eroded ring wall. The children swarmed after it. The lab fired off another sticky string, let it fall, and started to reel it back. A child picked it up and pulled. Lab and martian engaged in a tug of war which ended when the string broke. Another child poked a long, fragile finger into the cavity and withdrew it covered with something wet. Before it could boil away, he put the finger in his mouth. He sent out a pulse of pleasure and stuck his tongue in the hole, into the broth intended for growing martian microorganisms.

STOP THAT! THAT IS NOT YOUR PROPERTY!

The adult voice was ignored. The

child left his tongue in the broth, running alongside the lab to keep up. Presently the others discovered that if they stood in front of ABEL it would change course to crawl around the "obstruction."

PERHAPS THE ALIENS WILL BE SATISFIED TO RETURN HOME WITH THE INFORMATION GATHERED BY THE PROBE.

NONSENSE. THE CAMERAS HAVE SEEN THE CHILDREN. NOW THEY KNOW THAT WE EXIST.

WOULD THEY RISK THEIR LIVES TO LAND, MERELY BECAUSE THEY HAVE SEEN DITHTA? DITHTA IS A HOMELY CHILD, EVEN TO MY OWN EYE, AND I AM PERHAPS HIS PARENT.

LOOK WHAT THEY ARE DOING NOW.

By moving to left and right of the lab, by forming moving "obstructions", the children were steering ABEL toward a cliff. One still rode high on top, pretending to steer by kicking the metal flanks.

WE MUST STOP THEM. THEY WILL BREAK IT.

YES . . . DO YOU REALLY EXPECT THAT THE ALIENS WILL LAND A MANNED VEHICLE?

IT IS THE OBVIOUS NEXT STEP.

WE MUST HOPE THAT THE CHILDREN WILL NOT GET HOLD OF IT.

VIEWPOINT THE ALIEN

DICK GEIS



MORE UNTHINKABLE thoughts. I may be making a Serious Mistake with these unthinkable thoughts sections. People will come to expect them every column, and I doubt if I have enough for constant bi-monthly display/flaunting.

Nevertheless, with a little help from my friends I may stagger through. For instance, Barry Malzberg (rising young nihilist writer about town) sent me an article which appeared recently in the *New York* magazine . . . (or was it the *New Yorker*? I am nothing if not

uncertain) . . . which was by Ron Sproat and which detailed his stint in a porno factory ("The Working Day in a Porno Factory": ". . . I was expected to write 40 pages of erotic material a day—a 200-page novel a week for \$120. Still, it was a job . . .")

Since Jim Baen wants this column to be "a miniature *Alien Critic*" I have no qualms about quoting from Barry's letter (for which I have his grudging permission).

One of the things I like best about TAC is that one often comes across short Geisian interjections. These occur whenever Dick feels that a comment/reply is called for. I plan to maintain that Alien tradition in the Viewpoint. Except that it won't be Dick making with the smart-aleck remarks . . .

BAEN

So. Barry sent the article on the porno sweatshop and I responded with words to the effect that it was places like that that gave porno a bad name—that sheer junk writing as described by Sproat had driven the audience (and publishers!) for well-written porno away and killed a rising young genre . . . more or less. And that I didn't see how anybody could even *type* 40 pages a day (10,000 words, for God's sake) to say nothing of making the words coherent. As for plot, characterization, atmosphere, etc., forget it.

(When I was writing porno for a living the best I ever did was 20 pages a day, in a short two-week sprint, and I was young then, in 1960, and full of piss and vinegar. Nowadays I got no vinegar left.)

Barry, in turn, responded as follows:

"That's the agents' and writers' argument; Gresham's Law that is holding that this stuff will drive out the good work and the audience itself. I am not sure of this. My observations throughout the years have been—and the people at Typographics were gambling on this—that quality level meant nothing, that you were dealing with an audience of people who were drawn to the material for sub- or trans-

When in New York visit



Mecca for s-f and fantasy readers

- Nearly 2000 current paperback and hardcover titles
- Magazines and fanzines
- Rare old books and pulps
- Posters, puzzles, games and more

We welcome inquiries

56 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10014
741-0270

literary reasons and that as long as the words were there and the couplings they wouldn't even detect the difference between that and any other level of work right up to the highest professionalism. In short, any money paid in raising the quality level of the material would be wasted.

"Maurice Girodias's experience at the Olympia Press would certainly bear this out.

"If you think about it a while, the same argument kind of applies to s-f where the worst material (Perry Rhodan) appears to consistently outsell the best (*Camp Concentration*) with so few exceptions as to not really affect the gray overall pattern. Think of Charles Platt's letter (in *The Alien Critic* #8) which is quite a good statement of the problem.

"I can see the trend of the market cutting into two types of

work within fifteen years; cheap work like this hammered out by hacks at the lowest possible return and bestsellers which have been manipulated by publishers. There may be no middleground. Would you question that the market today looks harder to break than at any time in the last twenty years?"

Now that to me is absolutely unthinkable! Are most science fiction readers drawn to it for sub- or trans-literary reasons? Could it be true that as long as the material deals with aliens and spaceships and other planets and mutant humans and strange futures and time travel, etc., that it doesn't matter a damn if it's well-written or not?

I thought about it. My eyes glazed a bit as I remembered the well-known rules for gothic romance pocketbook covers: in gothics the cover *must* show a heroine in flight and/or fear, an old house or castle *must* appear in the background on a dark and/or stormy night, and there *must* be one lighted window showing . . . or the book won't sell worth a damn, no matter how well written.

(I guess the heroine has to be white, too. I've never seen a black heroine on a gothic pb cover.)

And I remembered Terry Carr's Ace Special line—quality science fiction with quality covers. The problem was the books didn't sell very well. Were the covers too "advanced" and "different"? Weren't the sf identification signals strong enough? Was the fiction too good?

And I know that the Ace Perry Rhodan reprints packaged in a pocketbook magazine format—aimed at a 10-year-old mentality—

are apparently a thriving success.

And I know that Don Wollheim's DAW pocketbook line of science fiction sells well. He uses traditional sf covers, dynamic and colorful, and his editorial policy is to publish a lot of sf adventure, a lot of traditional plots and themes.

I talked with Don Wollheim for about twenty minutes at a regional sf convention in Santa Monica, California, some years ago and he struck me as a keen-minded, pragmatic editor. He loves science fiction, and he is idealistic concerning how sf should portray mankind. His book, *The Universe Makers*, published by Harper & Row, details this essentially optimistic view of man's future.

An excellent book.

—BAEN

Don recognizes that most sf readers (as with most audiences for any type of entertainment) like the tried and true, the familiar, the reassuring . . . even the broadminded, free-thinking science fiction audience.

Don does publish some "different" sf, but not too much. He knows better than to anger and "cheat" his clientele; they have come to know what he publishes, they like it and they will feel betrayed and angry if he deviates too often, too radically, from the usual fare.

But to return and look straight into the awful face of the sf-sells-because-of-its-symbols and because it satisfies emotional needs in a certain number of people and quality doesn't count argument (which is actually a determinist/Freudian

argument and denies our sacred and inviolable Free Will, and is an assertion that we are ruled perhaps 90% of the time by our masked instincts and our sub-conscious . . .) I tend to agree with it with reservations.

The *they'll buy anything if their buttons are pushed* theory applies to any product *to a degree*. The degree it works probably depends on the product and the accessibility of buttons and triggers, and knowledge of how to push and pull them.

It's a fascinating, sometimes demoralizing subject, and everyone with an ounce of inflated ego should read the literature.

I think that in science fiction, the audience does reward quality writing with increased sales and popularity. But there are different kinds of quality in fiction, and the kind of superior writing Barry refers to (and the kind most intellectuals and "serious" writers and university professors consider the best of all sf writing) is not the kind that is very often rewarded with big (or even moderate) money.

I think there are three spheres of fiction writing: the "artistic", the "commercial" and the "juvenile". They are separate, with separate (if slightly overlapping) audiences, and I do not believe it is fair or appropriate to say one is superior or better than any of the others.

Generally speaking, the "artistic" fiction is concerned with style, experiment, subtle characterizations, message, understatement; "commercial" fiction is reader-oriented in that it seeks to satisfy natural story-lust and uses enter-

tainment values inherent in plot formulas; while "juvenile" fiction is pure story simplified to basic action/idea essentials.

Each type of fiction can be written superbly. Each type requires great skills and talents if it is to be done well.

There are only a few writers around who can write well enough to appeal to all three audiences at once, with a single work.

To get back to at least partially dismantling the they'll-buy-anything theory as it applies to science fiction: let me quote a paragraph or two or three from a self-published sf story sent to me recently for review.

(37 printed pages, double-spaced, typewritten, photo-offset 8½ x 11 format.)

It is titled *Ordiea*—Planet of Fear, and it was written by Janice M. Croy who says in an accompanying letter, "I wrote *Ordiea* for people who like to read something that is not full of dirt like so many other types of books today. It is basically sci-fi but also contains Atlantis, ESP, reincarnation & some present happenings."

I was prejudiced against her immediately; anyone who uses the abominable show biz construct "sci-fi" is not a Trufan or Trureader and cannot be considered one of Us.

(Yes, I know "sci-fi" was originated by Forry Ackerman—one of the great First Fans—but the media took it and *used* it and now it is a name for science fiction on a par with "colored" for blacks.)

Nevertheless, as a critic I am

pridefully objective, and I opened Janice Croy's impeccably printed "book" with BE FAIR lit up in my mind.

After a moment another sign switched on: BE VICIOUS! I must show you why. It begins:

INNER GALAXY NEWS:

March 21, 3007

Today is the day long to be remembered in the history of the UNITED FEDERATION OF GALAXIES. Four young Earthmen are going to leave our galaxy and venture into the second galaxy east of ours in search of other humanoid life. For over three years now, the top scientists of Earth, Mars, Zandar and our observatory on Pluto have been picking up codetype signals from the fifth planet in that small galaxy's solar system.

"I'm sure glad they wished us luck, we sure need it even though we have the newest rocket ship built. Just think, it has a meteor repeller shield, suspended animation chambers, and runs on thermonuclear energy," said Phil.

The four men were soon in a deep sleep traveling into the first galaxy. One year passes quickly, then just as they are nearing the second galaxy, the unexpected happened. The rocket ship is knocked off course by a huge asteroid. The automatic alarm awakens the men from their deep sleep.

"Oh, no! We've only been asleep for a year. Something has gone wrong," exclaims Phil. "Something happened all right. We've been

knocked off course to the south towards the Andromeda galaxy. If we're lucky we'll land on the 20th planet in its first solar system," replied John.

The men contacted NASA of their new course. They were instructed to go ahead with the original plans.

Oog. That mish-mash of ignorance and incredibly bad writing is enough to make any true sf enthusiast weep . . . or laugh. And I doubt that *any* habitual science fiction reader would buy the "book" out of pure symbol-reflex because it has other galaxies, planets, spacemen, rocket ships, etc. in it. (She wants \$1.50 for a copy, by the way, and the address is Janice Croy, 512 S. Logan, Denver, CO 80209 . . . just in case some of you DO want to read it.)

Barry's thoughts on the future of the sf publishing scene are another kettle of tentacles, and I have to suspect he may be right . . . with these observations of mine added: I think I see the growing number of sf and fantasy enthusiasts (fandom in the larger sense) divided into small, yet economically viable sub-genre specialty audiences which will be serviced by small publishing houses.

Small publishers have always sprung up in fandom to print books about and by favorite out-of-print writers—Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, E. R. Burroughs, etc., and to perpetuate limited-appeal styles of writing, as well as collections of critical works (Knight, Blish), and analyses of sf and of

specific writers (Panshin on Heine), and the bibliographic works are numerous and exhaustive.

But these small publishers were always marginal, usually unprofitable labors of love. Perhaps now, and in the future, I think these specialty publishers will find enough buyers to permit survival and even a bit of growth.

What man has done, man is doing, and man will do.

IDLE SPECULATION DEPT. On the one hand I dote on Grand Conspiracy theories of history and economics . . . and current events. And on the other hand I believe in the Accident theory of history and civilization.

(Nobody could conceivably have *planned* for the recent mess of 'fuel crisis', inflation, and Watergate. But the megabanks and the largest international corporations must be at least *trying* to control the future!)

There is in me, also, a strong desire to be as independent as possible, to be no man's servant, to owe no one. I hate and fear debt.

That's why I've always toyed with ideas of being a total hermit, of being an absolutely invisible hippie. (An invisible hippie is a person who lives off the surplus, the throw-aways of our society, and who wears the uniform of the square. The role-playing long-haired hippies get hassled; short-haired hippies wearing ties do not.)

I've accomplished this invisibility to a degree, but total independence has eluded me. (Even an invisible hippie is dependent on throw-aways.) For instance, I want to be able to run this house on electricity

converted from the sun's heat, or from wind power.

Unfortunately, it costs too much to be power-independent of society. The state of the sun-wind power conversion art is too primitive.

So, I'm waiting. The technological revolution is almost to the point where some smart-ass corporation will develop a *something*, a new, super-efficient battery or power-storage device which will give them a bigger profit margin on their new, heavy-duty factory franizams—and they won't realize until too late that it can make a house self-contained, independent of society in a very important aspect.

When that "equalizer" comes down the pike it'll spread like wildfire, and a *real* social revolution will follow.

That's the Accident theory of history.

Big Money hates such accidents. A billion dollars is very fearful, and it loves security and an assured future; it tries to make plans for itself, and that involves control—of governments, of culture, media, people . . .

But accidents happen!

Up till now industrialization and technology have worked to centralize power over things and people; inevitably humanity has become more and more interdependent.

But I have a hunch/wish that the process will turn around abruptly, by *accident*, and vast numbers of people will show a great thirst for that new-found bit of freedom and independence. They'll turn governments upside-down to get laws consistent with their new-found self-contained home cultures and so-

cities.

(And probably equally vast numbers of people will fear this change and resist the movement.)

The newly developing laser technology leads me to speculate that soon a powerful, deadly laser rifle/cannon will be put together that can be either mass produced or manufactured in the home workshop for peanuts. If this happens a home instantly becomes a too-dangerous-to-mess-with island of independence.

I just hope to God the thing isn't portable. BAEN

Not invincible, of course, but deadly enough to make it too expensive in men and material and preparation to assault by local, state, or even federal government. (A million rebellious families armed with laser cannon . . .)

It would also give any enemy government extreme pause to think.

I'm dreaming, I suppose. Idle speculation.

". . . when I wrote my first heroine-centered book—*Ordeal In Otherwhere*—the publisher protested against such innovation . . ."

—Andre Norton, interview,
Entropy #7

SOME SORT OF monument should be put up to mark this year—the year *Yandro* reached its 20th anniversary.

I know there are at least 40,000 of you out there now who are frowning and shrugging. What the

hell is *Yandro*?

Yandro is a fanzine. It is probably the second longest lived sf fanzine in the world. (Harry Warner's *Horizons* is likely the oldest regularly, continuously published zine at 138 quarterly issues . . . but *Horizons*, come to think, is much more a personal journal than a sf fanzine . . . so maybe *Yandro* is the oldest continuing fanzine.)

Yandro has seen the ink of a mimeograph 225 times, and in earlier years was a monthly, I believe, if memory serves. Now *Yandro* is irregular, but still appears six to eight times a year.

Who would be foolish and stubborn enough to publish a 30-plus page fanzine 225 times over twenty years? Robert and Juanita Coulson, that's who.

They also write science fiction and gothic novels, but that is secondary, of course.

Robert "Buck" Coulson is a gruff, opinionated, admirable man who has a massive accumulation of books (mostly sf), who reads omnivorously and who writes dozens of reviews in his characteristic to-the-point style that spares no writer's ego.

For instance, this review of *The Pritcher Mass* by Gordon R. Dickson is fairly typical:

'Actually this is the old van Vogt plot of the superman who doesn't know his own strength until his enemies force him to use it. Gordy ties up the loose ends better than van Vogt did, but he never really suspended my disbelief. Further, I'm getting tired of sf writers ending all our pollution problems by magic in the last

chapter. This is a pretty good adventure story, but Gordy has done a lot better.'

Buck also writes a column of fanzine reviews with ratings, about four times a year. His estimates of worth are fairly accurate (meaning I agree with him most of the time), and the addresses and prices he lists are invaluable for anyone wishing to explore the complex world of sf fan publishing.

Buck also writes an editorial column, "Rumblings", which deals with the life-style and vicissitudes of living of the Coulsons, and includes comments on any number of current local and national concerns.

Juanita has her opening personal column, "Ramblings", she comments on readers' letters printed in "Grumblings"—the letter column, and is the keeper of the mimeo (which means she runs off the issues).

It is worth noting that their young son, Bruce, is a chess enthusiast and writes a short personal column in *Yandro*, too. He is being groomed (I suspect—a Grand Strategy) to continue the zine when he is married and Buck and Juanita are too Old and Tired to continue.

Thus *Yandro*, a force unto itself, will continue down through the generations of fandom.

Used to be the Coulsons didn't want *Yandro* reviewed, to keep the circulation within bounds, but lately I haven't read of that restriction. If you'd like to try them for a copy, send 50¢ (and a stamped, self-addressed envelope in case they are not inclined to sell or are out of copies or whatever) to Robert & Juanita Coulson, Route 3, Hartford

City, IN 47348, USA.)

Ummm, maybe it would be best if you didn't tell them Geis sent you . . .

"Well, Torcon was a mess, but I enjoyed it. Actually, for the last several years I have not had any problems about being cornered by fools, hairy or otherwise—learning how to cut them off is how I got my fannish reputation. If I talk to someone for over five minutes or so, it's a good bet that I am enjoying the conversation. (It sometimes takes a few minutes to decide whether the other party is a fool or not, which is why I prefer to try out new acquaintances by mail first.)"

—Buck Coulson, commenting on a Jack Wodhams letter in *Yandro* 225

THE GROUND RULES for all the tons of mail you readers want to send me remain the same. Letters of comment and outrage and praise should all be sent to: Richard E. Geis, c/o IF, 235 East 45th St., New York, NY 10017.

The reason for this is that curiosity is killing Jim Baen, and he wants to keep a finger on the pulse of this column. He'll send all letters on to me.

Books and magazines should be sent directly to:

THE ALIEN CRITIC

POB 11408

Portland, OR 97211

I thank you. Until next time, may the next orange you suck have no needle punctures. (Inspired by a letter from a young woman fan here in Oregon who named her son Tripper. •



NO TIME LIKE THE PAST

*Tomorrow and tomorrow
and tomorrow . . .*

JERRY GOODZ

I HAVE been left to die. Of the five the ship abandoned only I still live. The others died one by one as we sat amidst the boxes and crates. No fanfare, no cries, no suffering. One moment they were staring into nothingness, the next they were dead.

I am alone, left to die, and know not why. What act condemned me? Did those who sentenced me and my companions to this place have just cause? No matter; I feel no fear, no anxiety, just acceptance of what seems so natural.

When we had first disembarked—when was that?—we'd begun to open the crates left with us; their contents, food containers, medicine kits, instruments and articles of

clothing now lay scattered about. Long before we finished we realized as had those before us, that we should sit quietly and wait for oblivion. It was but a short time away.

I WAIT. A dim prodding within my brain disturbs my tranquility, demanding I recall something, offering no clue as to what. My crime? (Had I committed one?) What other reason for abandonment? My past? I try to ignore this disturbing mental activity. All will be over soon. Eternity waits. My agitation grows, forcing me to remember. This planet, this bleak place of brush, sand and odd-shaped gray boulders has a name—but I can't recall ever knowing it.

Memories are stirring—but memories of some time ago . . .

The planet Montos, world dedicated to joy and excitement. Risa, woman of rapture, enslaver whose exotic perfumes mingled with the desire-driven rise of body heat, releasing aromas that banished inhibitions and stirred passion to an unbearable intensity. The craving to possess her smooth, sweetly scented body could only be curbed by utter exhaustion.

Montos—and Risa.

The frontier wars. Federation fleets clashing with Proxan hordes. Man and allied races fighting a breed of reptilian monsters, every battle a desperate one; defeat would mean obliteration. The terror of being ensnared by the Proxan pressor-beam, the exhilaration of pinpointing the aliens with our own weapons.

I remember battle—command—the deaths of comrades.

Exploration and discovery—that too I remember now. Calgara, the world my ship discovered, a world dominated by a life form instinctively hostile to all exo-sentients.

It was I who led the guard-force of the Exploratory Commission. I watched my men fighting and dying as we crawled through the dense steaming forests and voracious bogs, the inhabitants fighting us for every inch of ground. My men eventually forced the enemy to come to terms, thus securing yet another world for the Federation...

I remember victory—and I remember defeat.

My mind is alive with other battles, with the love of strange and fascinating females, with drinking and laughing and sorrowing with my shipmates . . .

What is the meaning of the four stinking, rotting corpses that lie littered about me? Who are they? Why are we here? It seems useless to think about the present, but still the prodding in my brain forces me to continue to recall—to continue climbing the ladder of memory until I've reached the final rung.

The Ulitarian incident—now I remember. I'd sent my ship across the neutral zone to overtake a Proxan raider that had massacred an agricultural colony on Ulitaria. We caught the raider, destroying it in scanner-range of the alien base.

I was immediately summoned to Federational Fleet Headquarters and arrived there ready to accept the consequences. But no charges were preferred. Instead I was ordered to undertake a special mission and gratefully made haste to do so.

What had followed? It no longer interests me. I don't care to pursue—again the twist of a nerve in my brain; again I am compelled to remember.

There had been an argument at fleet headquarters, a discussion I wasn't meant to hear, yet hear it I did.

"Is that dismal bit of space dirt worth more lives?" asked a mild

but determined voice.

"How the hell do I know? Not one team left any kind of record. Damn it—it's our service's responsibility to find out what's going on there," a harsh tone responded.

"Animals, wired . . ."

"No good. There's a strong magnetic force around Zingor that impedes monitoring instrumentation. We need men on the spot. We've got to solve this riddle. Zingor's atmosphere is almost identical to Earth's . . . one percent difference . . . one percent of a substance we can't identify. And who's to say we might not encounter it on some other world? Or what if the Proxans discover it?"

"Our people die mysteriously. So we send more. And they die. How long do we—?"

"Until we get some answers. The next team has already been selected. Commander Aurlo is the most fiercely competitive bastard in the service . . . an independent . . . a maverick who bends all the rules—but gets results. Maybe he can bend Zingor's rules . . . or its natural laws . . . or whatever it is that kills our men."

"And the precautions?"

"Aurlo's ship will remain in orbit and touch down every sixty days."

The mild voice turned explosive. "Sixty days! Autopsies indicate no one survived for more than three weeks."

"Can't be helped. It takes that long for ship's computer to de-

ionize after being immersed in Zingor's magnetic field . . ."

The conversation begins to fade, but the nagging infinitesimal spark blinking in my head forces me to worry at my memory like a dog with a bone.

I PUT it all together.

I am Aurlo—I am on the planet Zingor. My ship is orbiting above me and these dead bodies are from my own crew.

I have not been left to die but to live! To live!

But even as my spirit surges I feel the darkness seeping back. I must fight it, and—I suddenly realize—my memories are my only weapon. Risa, war, fear, glory! I can live only as long as I can retain my ability to recall. Strong emotions, so often man's bitterest enemy, are the means of defeating the malignancy of Zingor.

I will not die. I'll bury my dead, feed myself, record my findings and await the arrival of my ship. Somewhere in the crates are breather units and those I must have. I will squeeze my brain's storehouse of years gone by.

I feel hunger and fatigue, and they reassure me—I am once again subject to normal stimuli. But first I must find a breather unit. I start to rise, sensing peace and exhaustion but the feeling passes—I have been left to die—and don't know why.

It is not important.

BERSERKER'S PLANET

FRED SABERHAGEN



Part II of II

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

CARLOS SUOMI, interior designer with pacifist inclinations, has accompanied tycoon and big-game hunter, OSCAR SCHOENBERG, on a clandestine expedition to Hunters' Planet. There, once every fifteen standard years, the best hunting in the known galaxy can be found, though outworlders' trips such as SCHOENBERG'S are frowned on by the Interstellar Authority.

Also, five hundred years before, in the solar system of which Hunters' is a part, the great commander JOHANN KARLSEN led a human-manned fleet to victory over the berserkers. Berserkers are automated warships and auxiliary machines built during some interstellar war between long-vanished races, and at the time of the story will ravaging the galaxy, their programmed purpose being the destruction of all life.

One berserker survived the war on Hunters' Planet, and was hidden by a cult of humans who worshipped it as Death personified. This intelligent machine has worked with generations of human aides until its secret cult has become the most powerful group on the planet, challenged only by the shadowy organization called the Brotherhood. The berserker's goal is to obtain a starship and carry out its programmed tasks of depopulating the planet and—killing the berserkers' great enemy KARLSEN.

The plan to seize a starship involves luring some outworld craft to land at Godsmountain, where the cultists now openly manage the planet-wide worship of Thorun, god of war and of the hunt, and the chief object of worship on this planet of hunters and warriors. In the Hunterian pantheon, KARLSEN has also become a demigod. Outworlders are to be lured by the prospect of watching a Tournament of warriors fighting to the death in single combat. The winner and sole survivor of the Tournament is promised a place of eternal honor at Thorun's right hand, while even the losers are assured of godhood.

SCHOENBERG, fascinated by the intensity of life attainable during moments of extreme danger, and by heroic deeds (he and SUOMI have both made recordings of KARLSEN'S battle messages, which are still radiating through interstellar space) wants to watch the Tournament, and lands his ship on a small mesa on Godsmountain's flank. Aboard as his guests, besides SUOMI, are GUS DE LA TORRE, who turns out to be a sadist; ATHENA POULSON, who is SCHOENBERG'S private secretary and the chief reason for SUOMI'S coming on the trip; and CELESTE SERVETUS and BARBARA HURTADO, playgirls who were brought along for male consumption like the cigars and the wine.

ANDREAS, head of the secret berserker cult and also High Priest

of Thorun, sends the demigod Mjollnir [really a robot designed by the berserker and utilizing some berserker components, but built by Hunterian craftsmen] with some picked warriors to seize the ship while SUOMI is on guard and most of the other Earth people are watching the Tournament.

BARBARA is taking a shower inside the ship when SUOMI hears the attacking party climbing the mesa's sheerest side.

THE climber rolled the great length of his frame out onto the horizontal surface of the mesa and raised his gigantic head to look straight at Suomi. The impassive face, its lower half masked by wild dark beard and mustache, was of the right size to fit the head, and yet it was subtly wrong. Not that it was scarred, or intrinsically deformed. Though it was no mask in the ordinary sense, it was yet artificial. Too skillfully artificial, like the work of some mad artist, convinced he could fool people into thinking that this robot, this dummy, was a man.

The figure rose gracefully to its feet and Suomi saw something that its body had obscured. At the very edge of the cliff a climber's piton had been hammered into the rock. The end of a line was knotted to an eye in the piton and the line went tautly back out of sight over the cliff. Now the face of a second climber, this one of normal stature, indubitably human, rose into view.

Meanwhile the trailblazing giant had risen to his full height. He was taller than anyone Suomi had ever seen. As he stood up he thrust a

mountaineer's hammer into a pouch at his waist and with the same motion of his arm unsheathed an enormous sword.

Suomi had come to a dead stop, not paralyzed with fear as he had been by the glacier-beast, but simply unable to form any satisfactory explanation for what his senses were recording.

The first answer to cross his mind was that this was all some ugly and elaborate practical joke arranged by Schoenberg or De La Torre but he realized even before the idea was fully formed that they would hardly think it necessary to go to so much trouble to scare him. And Schoenberg, at least, would have too much sense to yell boo at a nervous man with a loaded weapon.

The second explanation to pop into Suomi's head was that there must be hooligans on Hunters' planet the same as everywhere else, and some of these had come to see what they might steal from the outworlders' ship.

But the marauders' giant leader was not covered by either of these hypotheses. The mind stopped and boggled at the sight, then tried to go around it and proceed.

With some vague idea of scaring off bandits, Suomi began to unsling the rifle from his back. As he did so the incredible giant took two steps toward him with its sword upraised, then halted as if satisfied with its position.

By this time the second climber, a Hunterian warrior, young and tough-looking, was completely up on the cliff-top and proceeding with drawn sword toward the open hatchway of the ship. The third,

also of normal size, was right behind him.

"Halt," said Suomi, conscious even as he spoke of the uncertainty in his own voice. He felt foolish when no one halted even though the rifle was now in his hands.

Now there were two human invaders on top of the mesa besides the man-shaped giant, and another armed man was climbing into sight. The ship's hatch stood open and—except for Suomi—unprotected. And Barbara was in there.

He had not leveled the rifle at them yet, but now he did, and shouted "Halt!", this time with conviction. Instantly the huge figure lunged toward him, faster than any human could conceivably move. The man-slicing sword was held high, ready to strike. Suomi squeezed the trigger, realized when it failed to move that he had failed to release the safety. Instinctively he stepped back from the onrushing sword and felt his foot move into empty air. His left hand, grabbing wildly for support, caught hold of the climbing rope and saved him from a killing fall. The misstep dropped him only a short distance down from the edge of the mesa, but still his heel came down on rock with an impact that jarred his leg and spine. His arm twisted with the fall and the rope slipped from his grip. He lost all footing, tumbled and rolled on gravel, and stopped when he came up with a breathtaking slam against an outcropping of rock. Still he was only about halfway down the path, the steepest part of which was just below him.

With his back against the rock that had stopped him, he half sat,

half lay there, facing up the hill. Dazedly he realized that he was not seriously injured, and that his right hand still held the rifle. Now his finger found the small safety lever beside the breech and turned it back. Somehow he even remembered to set it for full automatic fire.

The giant man-thing with its sword upraised reared into view above. When it saw Suomi it dropped itself onto the steep slope with the grace of a dancer. With sword leveled at him now it descended upon him, moving under perfect control, one long bounding stride, two . . .

THE rifle stuttered in Suomi's hands. The sword-brandishing golem's left arm erupted in a spray of dry-looking particles and smoke as the man-thing spun in an incredible pirouette, more graceful by far than any wounded animal. Knocked off balance and deflected from its course by the shock of the rifle's force-packets, the towering shape slid past Suomi and on down the slope.

But it did not fall. In another moment, near the bottom, it had regained full control and stopped its slide. Then it turned and was calmly climbing, like a mountain goat, at a fast run. The sword, whirling and gleaming, came toward him once again, the face below it a mask of insane serenity.

Suomi uttered a sobbing noise, a compound of terror and frustration. In his hands the rifle leaped and kicked, firing continuously while he struggled to keep it aimed. The fur-clad monster, face still

without expression beneath the silver headband, was stopped in its tracks. Puffs of fur flew from it under the barrage, and splinters and streaks of unidentifiable debris. Then it was hurled back down the hill, still staggering to keep its feet, black cloak alternately furling and flying. Far at the bottom Suomi's continuing mad fusillade pinned it like an insect, leaping and convulsing wildly, against an immovable tree trunk.

A force-packet dissolved the silver headband and half the monster's face in a gray bloodless smear. The sword flew from its hand. With a final, awkward, uphill lunge, the figure fell. It rolled over on the ground and lay inert. At last Suomi released the trigger.

Suddenly all was quiet. The sky, the mesa, seemed to be whirling around Suomi's head. He realized that he was sprawled precariously on the steep slope, his head considerably lower than his feet. One false move and he would go plunging down. He was breathing in little sobbing gasps. Moving very carefully, still clutching the precious rifle, he got his feet more or less beneath him. Now he could feel a dozen cuts and bruises from the fall.

He should get back up and defend the ship. But the slope just above him was impossible. How had he survived the tumble down? He must be tougher than he had realized. His rolling descent had taken him away from the regular climbing path. Couldn't get back to it here by going sideways. He would have to go all the way down and start up again on the proper route.

To get down he had to re-sling the rifle and use both hands to grip the rock. In his present state he took without thinking about them slides and drops that would certainly have broken his ankles if he had essayed them calmly.

At the bottom he kept his eyes on the figure of his fallen enemy. He unslung the rifle once again, but it was not needed. His rifle fire had beaten the facing surface of the great tree trunk into splinters, which had showered down with leaves and twigs to make a patchy carpet on the ground. On top of this carpet a giant doll lay huddled where his violence had flung it.

SUOMI, the killer, still unable to understand, now unable to take his eyes away, came closer. This time, too, as with the glacier-beast, there was scattered fur, though this fur was a long-dead dull brown instead of gallant orange.

He prodded with the rifle's muzzle, put out a hand, moved the tattered cloak. What was left of the thing's face was turned away. Beneath the torn fur garments the bulky torso itself was torn and shattered, pilling madness into the light of day. No blood and bones this time, but wads of stuff that might have filled a doll. Amid this stuffing were disjointed metal rods and cams and wheels, here and there a gleaming box or tube, and running through all were complex networks of metal cables and insulated wires with an irregular, handmade look about them. And this, some power source. A hydrogen lamp? No, a nuclear fuel cell, not made to ener-

gize a robot, but doubtless serving well enough.

He had killed, yet he had not. This corpse had never lived, that much was certain. Now he could look more coolly. He touched the side of the cheek above the beard, and it felt like smooth leather. The fur clothing over the torso had never covered skin, only a carapace of hand-worked metal armor. In its slight irregularities of shape and thickness the armor reminded Suomi of a warrior's shield he had just seen at the Tournament below. At close range the energy rifle had opened this crude armor like an egg. Inside were the structural parts, cables and rods and such, also handworked, and mysteriously jumbled with these were a few sealed boxes, smooth and perfect in shape and finish, obviously of quite different origin than the rest . . .

He grasped at his belt. The communicator was gone, and he realized with dismay that it must have been knocked or scraped from its holder at some point during his fall.

"Carlos!" It was Barbara's voice, shrill with panic, coming from somewhere out of sight above him. "Carlos, help—" It cut off abruptly there.

Suomi ran to the foot of the climbing path and looked up. In view at the top was the head of one of the Hunterian men who had scaled the cliff. Suomi took an ascending step; at once the man's hands came into view, holding a short, thick bow with arrow nocked and ready. Suomi began to lift the rifle, and an arrow buzzed past his ear. It brought a pang of authentic

fright, but Suomi did not shoot back. Dropping one man dead up there was not going to help: Superior firepower or not, Suomi was not going to be able to do anything for Barbara, or regain the ship, without help. It would be impossible to climb the path with the rifle in his hands and once he slung his weapon he would be at a hopeless disadvantage.

He must get help. Suomi turned and ran, ignoring signals of damage from his bruised and bleeding legs and aching back. He headed for the site of the Tournament to spread the alarm. The rifle was not noisy and probably no one there had heard the firing.

Before he had gotten fifty meters into the trees, a line of uniformed men holding bows and spears at the ready appeared before him, deployed at right angles to his path, cutting him off. A white-robed priest stood with them. The uniformed soldiers of Godsmountain, and they were not coming to help the outworlder against bandits but were leveling their weapons in his direction. "Try to take him alive," the priest said clearly.

Suomi abruptly altered course once more, running downhill for greater speed, angling away from both soldiers and ship. Behind him there were signal-like whistles and birdcall cries.

A single set of footsteps came pounding after him, gaining ground. Suomi visualized another robot monster. He stopped and turned, saw that it was only a human soldier, but still fired with deadly intent. He missed, blowing a notch out of a tree limb above his

pursuer's head. Whether wounded by splinters, stunned by concussion, or merely frightened, the man dove for cover and gave up the chase. Suomi fled. In the distance other men still whistled and signaled to one another, but the sounds grew fainter as he ran. When at last, utterly winded, he threw himself down in a dense tangled thicket, no sound came to him but his own laboring lungs and pounding blood.

VII

WHEN Suomi walked away from the Tournament, Schoenberg noted that Athena was looking after him, an annoyed expression on her face. The two of them seemed to annoy each other, and that was about all. It was beginning to look as if nothing interesting was going to happen between them one way or another—which was just as well from Schoenberg's point of view because the girl was an invaluable worker and intensely loyal. Schoenberg would hate to lose her.

He wondered how she had become interested in a man like Suomi. He seemed like such a marshmallow, trailing her passively, failing at the hunt, trying to stay away from the Tournament on principle and failing that, then puking at the sight of blood when he did come. Of course such a miserable performance record might in some way prove attractive to a woman. Schoenberg had long ago given up trying to predict what women might do. That was one reason he liked having them around at

all times; they were sure to generate surprises.

On his other side, Celeste moved a little closer and brushed very lightly against his arm. That one was becoming tiresome. No more pretense of independence. Now she just couldn't bear to be separated from him, it seemed.

All at once he forgot about women.. The recess was drawing to a close and the priest Leros had his list of names in hand and was about to read from it once more.

"Rudolph Thadbury—Thomas the Grabber."

Thadbury, with the air of a military leader, saluted both Leros and Thomas with his sword. Thomas gave his spear an indefinite wave that might or might not have been a response, then leveled it and moved forward. Schoenberg watched the action critically. He thought he was already beginning—only beginning, of course—to appreciate how a duel with edged and pointed weapons should be fought.

Since a sword has not a spear's range of attack Rudolph slid aside from the deep thrusts and hacked at the shaft of the spear when he could, trying to sever the spearhead and to move inside the spear's most effective range to a lesser distance, where the advantage would lie with the swordsman. All this was not very different from what Schoenberg had expected. He had read historians' theoretical treatments of personal combat, and had watched Anachronists on Earth playing with their dull weapons. He had never taken up one of their wooden swords, though; he did not care for playing much.

Thadbury had no success in hacking at the spear shaft, for it was bound with twisted strips of metal running lengthwise and the sword could not cut through. Nor did he get many chances to try; the Grabber was plainly a master of his chosen weapon. Rudolph could not move in to the range at which he wished to fight. Thomas kept his spear's long shaft flicking in and out, lightly as a serpent's tongue, and still used it handily to parry whenever it seemed the sword might reach his face or bulky torso. And then, suddenly, incredibly, Thomas was no longer staying back to get the maximum advantage from his weapon's greater range. Instead he brushed the sword out of the way with the spear shaft and leaped in to close with his opponent in a wrestler's grip.

A cry of surprise went up around the ring, and Thadbury too was taken off guard. Sword and spear fell to the trodden earth together and the two men stamped and whirled in a grotesque dance, each trying to trip and throw the other. But Thomas had the advantage of strength and skill as well. When they fell he was on top, Rudolph prone beneath him. Thomas's massive right forearm became a lever to crush Rudolph's wiry neck. Rudolph, belly down on the ground beneath his foe, kicked, wretched, and twisted with desperate strength. His struggles seemed useless. His face went red, then purple.

Schoenberg thought that what was left of the oxygen in his bloodstream and lungs must be going fast. He hoped the man would be

speedily out of his pain, even as he pushed Celeste back a little and stepped slightly to one side to get a better look at the coming of death. He knew that a lot of people on Earth, seeing him standing here and watching so intently, would think he was a sadist. In fact, he wished no living creature suffering.

Schoenberg wished that he could enter the Tournament himself. Of course he knew full well that he was no more qualified to face such men as these with edged weapons, than they were to meet him with energy rifles. The season before, when he had been hunting with Mikenas, Mikenas had shown him how to use a hunting spear and Schoenberg had successfully impaled some dangerous game on his borrowed weapon. That had been one of the most memorable experiences of his life, and he had never mentioned it to anyone.

Of course competing in a Tournament like this was a far different matter. Not that he could reasonably expect to be allowed to enter anyway. Maybe he could find out just how one qualified in the preliminaries, and when the next planet-wide Tournament was going to be held. He assumed there would be another one, probably next hunting season. Then if he found some way to practice on Earth, and came back in fifteen years . . . maybe one of these men's sons would kill him then.

It was unlikely, to put it mildly, that he would ever be able to win a major Tournament on Hunters' planet, no matter how much practice and fair preparation he got in. He was not anxious to die, and

when he saw violent death approaching he knew that, as in the past, he would be afraid. But it would be worth it; worth it, worth it. For the timeless share of intense life to be experienced before the end. For the moments of full perfect being when the coin marked Life and Death spun before the altar of the god of chance, moments more valuable than so many years of the dreariness that made up most of what men called civilization.

Now Rudolph could no longer strain to throw his killer off, could no longer even grate out noises from his mouth and throat. His face was hideous and inhuman. There was no sound now but Thomas the Grabber's honest panting. That quieted shortly as Thomas sensed the life below him fled. He let Rudolph's head fall, got to his feet, very easy and limber in his movements for such a bulky man.

Schoenberg glanced at Celeste, who was looking at her fingernails. Not horrified by what was going on, only mildly disgusted. When he looked at her she gave him a quick questioning smile. He turned to Athena. She was watching the men arm themselves for the next fight, was deep in her own thoughts. Schoenberg and the rest of the outside world had been forgotten.

De La Torre came ambling up, from the direction of the ship, to stand beside them. "How'd the last one go?" he asked Schoenberg, craning his neck a little to view the bodies where they had been dragged.

"It went all right. They both fought well."

"VANN the Nomad—Wull Narvaez."

This should be the last fight of the day.

Athena turned her head but not her eyes to Schoenberg and whispered: "What are those things on his belt?"

There were two or three pairs of them, strung on a cord. "They appear to be human ears."

De La Torre emitted a high-pitched snicker, that made Schoenberg glance over at him for a moment, frowning in surprise.

Vann the Nomad was waving his long sword with what seemed to be the clumsy movements of an amateur, but nobody now watching him could be taken in by that deception for a moment. The show now became almost comical, for Narvaez, too, affected an innocent appearance. He looked so like a harmless peasant that the look must have been carefully cultivated. Wull carried a pitchfork, and made tentative jabbing motions with it toward his foe. Wull's dress was crude, and his mouth pursed grotesquely, so that he looked for all the world like some angry, mud-footed farmer nerving himself to unfamiliar violence.

The six warriors who had already survived the day's dangers were relaxed now and in a mood for humor, enjoying the charade. They hooted and whistled at clumsy-looking feints, and called out rough advice. Leros glanced around at them in irritation once, but then to Schoenberg's surprise said nothing.

With a flash of insight Schoenberg realized that the contestants in a Tournament like this one must

stand closer to the gods than even a priest of Leros's rank.

Vann tried several times to cut the pitchfork's shaft, which was not armored with metal, but Narvaez had a way of turning the fork that minimized the swordblade's impact, and the wooden shaft seemed very springy and tough. When Vann's tactics had failed him several times he tried something new; grabbing at the fork with his free hand. He was so fast that on his first attempt he managed to seize the weapon, getting a good grip on it just where the tines branched out. With this grip he pulled the surprised Wul Narvaez off balance while his sword thrust low and hard.

He took the ears of Narvaez before the man was dead, warning the maul-slave off with a snarl, until he had made sure of undamaged trophies.

ATHENA, blinking, came back to full awareness of her surroundings once again. She looked for Schoenberg, and saw that he had turned away and was waiting to talk to the High Priest Andreas, who had just come in sight on the road that descended from the mountaintop, walking with a small escort of soldiers.

De La Torre, moving closer to Athena, asked her in a low voice: "Did you get that last little bit?"

"What?" Not having understood, she turned to him with a look of expectancy.

"I was talking about the ear-cutting, whether you got that part down on crystal. I've been making a few recordings too."

The expectancy in her face dimmed, then vanished abruptly as realization came. The crystal on which her day's anthropological records were to have been made still hung unused at her belt.

ANDREAS, after having made a short congratulatory speech to the surviving warriors, turned quickly to Schoenberg and inquired: "Have you enjoyed the day's competition?"

"We who are here have enjoyed it very much. I must apologize for Suomi, the one who became ill, as you may have heard. I do not think he will come to watch again."

Andreas's lip curled slightly but he made no further comment. None was needed. Such a man was beneath contempt and unworthy of discussion. He asked: "Will all of you join me at a feast in the Temple of Thorun tonight? All of you, that is, who are now here. We can ascend at once to the city if that is convenient."

Schoenberg hesitated only marginally. "I did not think to bring a gift for Thorun with me from the ship."

Andreas smiled. What was the naive old saying? If a smile disfigures a man's face, then that man is bad. The High Priest said: "I am sure you will provide a suitable gift. There is no hurry about it, not now."

"Very well." Schoenberg glanced at those of his shipmates present. All watched him expectantly and appeared perfectly ready to be Thorun's guests. "Just let me say a word to the people waiting at the

ship. Only take a minute."

"Of course." Andreas, noble savage, turned politely away.

Schoenberg took his communicator from his belt and spoke into it. Looking toward the ship he thought he could just see the head of Suomi, who must be sitting down in his sentry's position at the top of the climbing path.

It was Barbara who answered. "Hello?" Her voice was uncertain.

"Look, Barb, those of us down here now have been invited up to visit the Temple. A feast is scheduled. I'm not sure when we'll get back to the ship. Tell Suomi to be sure to get inside before dark and button the thing up. One of you call me if any problems should arise; I'll call you again when we're ready to start back. Okay?"

There was a little pause, and then she only said, "Okay."

"Everything all right?"

"Yes. Okay, Oscar."

Just hearing about the Tournament and thinking about it must have upset her, he supposed. Probably she had been holding Suomi's hand while he recounted bestial horrors. Well, next trip he would choose his traveling companions more carefully. None of this bunch were exactly what he had hoped for.

Except next time he might be coming here alone, not expecting to return to Earth. He wondered if he could really teach himself, on Earth, to use edged weapons with real skill. He wondered if he would do better with sword or axe or spear. Tonight, if everything went well, he would have a chance to mention his plan to Andreas.

THE little party of outworlders and their casual escort of a few soldiers began to climb the smooth-paved mountain road, Andreas and Schoenberg walking together in the lead. "It is only a few kilometers to the top," Andreas informed them. "Perhaps an hour's walk if we take our time. Your hours on Earth are about the same length as ours, not so?"

When they had walked only about half a kilometer along the zig-zag, climbing road they came to the place where, as Andreas pointed out, the ring was being prepared for the next day's fighting. Here the mountain was steeper, less level space was available, and one side of the ring overlooked a bank that was almost a precipice. After another kilometer the switchback road passed between twin stone watch-towers from which sentinels saluted the party crisply with their spears. Andreas returned the salutes.

They must be nearing the summit now. The slope of the mountain moderated again and the road wound through a park-like wood. Many of the trees bore fruit. The earth below them was hidden under a vine-like groundcover plant that put up leaves like blades of grass.

Presently the trees thinned out, the ground leveled and they came in sight of the citadel-city on the mountain's crown. As the road brought them near the city's bone-white walls, straight toward a yawning gate, Schoenberg glanced back once in the direction of the ship. He was developing a faint uneasiness that he found hard to shake. He could see only the top of the metal

sphere above the trees before he passed into the city.

Inside, there was at first little to be seen, except more walls of bright white stone. As they made their way in through the streets, Schoenberg found them narrow and busy. Gray-clad slaves, and carts pulled by multihorned draft animals, made way for white-robed aristocrats. Here and there an elegant woman eyed the visitors from a sedan chair or a grilled window. Windows were usually small, doors usually kept closed, walls invariably white. There was a deadly sameness to the architecture of the city. Catching Andreas's eye, Schoenberg asked: "May we take pictures here?"

"Of course. You must take one of me, later. I shall treasure it."

The white-garbed lords of the planet were lining the visitors' path now in considerable numbers, bowing lightly and courteously, showing somewhat more curiosity than Schoenberg had ever before seen displayed by Hunterians. Athena was smiling and waving to the women and children in white who were visible peering from windows or around corners. Those in gray, male and female, generally seemed too hurried to look up. It occurred to Schoenberg that there were no gray-clad children visible.

"The Temple of Thorun." Andreas had stopped and was pointing to a pair of high gates of heavy metal grillwork that guarded the entrance to a courtyard lined on three sides by buildings of the ubiquitous white. These were somewhat taller than any of the visitors had passed on their way through the city.

"There we will feast tonight."

ONCE THE party had passed through the gates, Andreas bade the visitors a temporary goodbye, and himself went on toward the building that Schoenberg took to be the Temple proper, the tallest structure, some twelve or fifteen meters high, with broad white steps and forbidding doors.

The outworlders were guided by bowing young priests into another nearby building and there shown to individual rooms, all of which were out of sight of the street, opening onto a kind of formal garden in an enclosed court.

Led into his room by the obsequious manservant assigned to him, Schoenberg found it a small but pleasant place. The small window was protected by an ornamental grill, soft rugs covered the floor, and there was a comfortable-looking bed. An invitation to stay overnight seemed to be in the cards. His manservant was laying out white garments produced from somewhere, and through the open door other servants were visible, carrying in haste what appeared to be a bathtub.

A little later, getting his back scrubbed—hardly necessary, but let them do things their way—he found that the unexpected degree of hospitality had to some extent allayed the unease that had begun to nag him. Now, though, he suspected that Andreas was going to ask him some rather large favor before they parted. What could it be? Probably to smuggle in some out-world weapons, something needed to reduce some particularly trouble-

some adversary.

The swift tropical Hunterian night had come on by the time he had finished bathing and dressing. A young priest was promptly at hand to conduct him to the feast; it seemed that everything was running on a smooth schedule.

With a word to his guide he stopped at Athena's room, next to his, and found her ready to join him, as prompt as when they went off on a business trip. Her guide had told her that De La Torre and Celeste, whose rooms were next along a covered walk, had already gone on ahead.

Joking a little about what sort of merchandise they might hope to sell to their new client Andreas, Schoenberg and Athena followed their guides from one courtyard and cloister to another without being brought again in sight of the city's streets. Evidently the Temple complex was extensive.

At last they entered a small door in the flank of the tall building Schoenberg recognized as the Temple itself and were led down to a large room a short distance below ground level. It was refreshingly cool after the day's sunlit warmth.

Already at table were De La Torre and Celeste, also garbed in white, De La Torre with a leafy garland on his head like some ancient Roman. With them sat the High Priest, and half a dozen other men all of the highest rank. Some of these had accompanied Andreas on his first welcoming visit to the outworlders' ship.

Servants moved quietly and efficiently about. The banquet room was large, pleasingly decorat-

ed with fine hangings, softly lit with well-placed candles. All was as it should be.

"Our host has been telling me about Thorun's great hall," said De La Torre, after greetings had been exchanged.

"So?" Schoenberg moved a hand around in an inclusive gesture. "Is this the place?"

One of the Inner Circle priests grinned, broadly and cynically. "No, Thorun's is really quite a different world from ours. Or yours."

AS AT the Tournament, Schoenberg, when seated, found himself between Athena and Celeste. Here, despite the outwardly pleasant surroundings, not only Celeste but Athena kept drawing close to him, as if unconsciously. Not only were there no other women guests this evening, but Schoenberg had the feeling that there might never have been any in the history of the Temple. Andreas and the other Hunterian leaders never spoke to Athena unless she asked them a direct question, which she did of course from time to time to show her nerve. Celeste, being a good playgirl, knew when she was expected to keep quiet. If the Hunterians knew her real status, Schoenberg supposed, they would be outraged.

No doubt about it, his party was being accorded extraordinary treatment. He would have to at least appear to agree to their request when it came, whatever it might be.

The feast was elaborate and very good, though Schoenberg with an apologetic explanation to Andreas advised the other outworlders not

to partake of certain dishes, nor of the fermented milk that was brought before them in great bowls. "It will be better for our Earthly stomachs if we drink clear water here, if Thorun does not object."

Andreas waved a negligent hand. "Thorun is largely indifferent to such matters. Clear water is always a good warriors' drink."

Schoenberg sipped his water, from a golden cup. "I look forward to seeing the next round of the Tournament."

"I, too. I am delighted that our interests coincide. Unfortunately business has prevented me from seeing any of the earlier rounds."

"I know what the press of business can be like."

Celeste's foot was tapping under the table. Dancers had come on the scene and she was watching them with professional interest. They were good, girls and youths dancing together, the show very crude by Earth standards of course, and too bluntly erotic in places, but well practiced and full of energy. The Hunterian men at table watched the show with somewhat grim expressions, or did not watch it at all. Schoenberg wondered if priests here were supposed to be celibate. He would get around to asking that later, if at all. Sex on any planet was likely to be an even more sensitive subject than religion, which these religious leaders did not appear to take too seriously.

All was new and interesting to the outworlders and the evening passed quickly for them. The night was well advanced, the candles burning low, and the dancers literally collapsed from exhaustion,

when Schoenberg suggested that the time had come for him and his party to return to their ship.

Andreas made a gesture of polite disapproval. "Your beds here have been prepared. One of the dancing girls yonder will share yours with you if you like."

"The offer is most pleasing. But I am concerned about my ship."

"Stay here. Spend the night under Thorun's roof. You and I have much more to talk about. And it would be unpleasant, trying to climb the tall rock at night to reach your ship."

Schoenberg did not take long to make up his mind. "We accept your invitation gladly. If you will excuse me, though, I must talk briefly to the people on the ship." He took the communicator from his belt, activated it, waited for an answer. None was immediately forthcoming. He raised the device to his mouth and spoke. "Suomi?"

"Stay here," said Andreas, making his face hideous with his smile. "In the morning I will try to facilitate your meeting with him."

"You will try . . . I do not understand."

"You see, the man you left to guard your ship is there no longer. It is shameful but necessary to explain that while the last round of the Tournament was in progress he took fright and fled from that place. I did not wish to worry you unnecessarily, but we have not yet managed to locate him."

Schoenberg sat up straight, giving Andreas his best tycoon's look. "And what about my ship?"

"We are guarding it for you. Nothing in it will be damaged. No



King Size or
Deluxe 100's.

Micronite filter.
Mild, smooth taste.
America's quality cigarette.
Kent.

Kings: 16 mg. "tar," 1.0 mg. nicotine;
100's: 18 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine;
Menthol: 18 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine;
av. per cigarette, FTC Report Mar. '74.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.



*Try the crisp, clean taste
of Kent Menthol.*

The only Menthol with the famous Micronite filter.

Kings: 16 mg. "tar," 1.0 mg. nicotine;
100's: 18 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine;
Menthol: 18 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine;
av. per cigarette, FTC Report Mar. '74.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

one can reach it, except by my authority. Come, I must insist you stay the night."

VIII

SHORTLY after the next morning's dawn a slave came around to waken the eight survivors of the Tournament.

Giles the Treacherous, roused instantly by the light tug on his sleeping robe, rolled over, remembered fully where he was, and came awake with something of a start. Sitting up, he rubbed sleep from his eyes and looked about him, then observed to anyone who cared to listen: "Our camp is growing somewhat smaller day by day."

Though most of the seven others were awake, none of them chose to respond immediately. Like Giles, they had simply wrapped themselves in robes or blankets for sleep, and now there was a general slow emergence, as of a gathering of insects from cocoons.

It had rained a little during the night. The morning was gray and cheerless. On the previous evening the eight warriors had bedded down quite close together, as if by common consent against some external danger. The space they now occupied was tiny indeed compared with that of the first fine encampment beside the river far below.

When Giles stood up the river was visible to him down there, bend after bend of it snaking across the flat country until it lost itself at last in fields of morning mist. Down there croplands made ragged rectangles. For a moment—a moment only—Giles wished with the inten-

sity of physical pain that he was somewhere in his own remote province, striding stupidly behind a plow, as once he had done, long ago.

Long ago.

Omír Kelsumba, giant and black, was standing a few paces away and preparing to empty his bladder down the hill. The slaves had not gotten around to digging a latrine for this campsite before most of them were for some reason called away to other duties, yesterday afternoon. Omír spoke over his shoulder to answer Giles at last: "Tonight we will need less space still, but what of that? Soon all of us will be dwelling in Thorun's hall, where there must be room enough for any man."

"Well spoken," commended Farley of Eikosk, standing tall to stretch, then bending and with deft movements of his freckled arms starting to roll up his sleeping robe. Like his weapons, it looked costly.

By now all of the warriors were up, busy scratching, stretching, spitting, rolling their sleeping robes in preparation for moving camp. Farley of Eikosk went to offer a prolonged obeisance before the altar of Thorun, kneeling and murmuring prayers, bending his forehead to the ground. Soon Kelsumba joined him, and then Charles the Upright, and then one by one the others, until all had offered at least perfunctory worship. The enigmatic face of the little image of Thorun showed no sign of favoring any.

Vann the Nomad was hungriest this morning, it seemed, being first to leave the shrine and move toward

the cooking fire where a single gray-clad slave was preparing what looked like a very simple morning meal.

As Vann moved away, Giles said in a low voice to Kelsumba: "What do you think of that one, cutting ears for trophies?" Kelsumba only grunted in reply. He had begun to inspect his axe, checking to see if the night's rain had gotten through its carefully wound and oiled wrappings to rust the steel. Except for the axe, everything Kelsumba owned was shabby and worn.

While crouching over his axe and looking at it closely, he said to Giles: "You are perhaps a wise man. Maybe you can give me an opinion on this. Suppose I do not win the Tournament. Even so, having come this far, I will be seated high up at Thorun's table. Will he listen to me, do you suppose? If I die today or tomorrow will he intercede with the goddess of healing to grant a favor for me?"

Giles gave a little private sigh. "Such a question is beyond me," he answered. "But it is generally believed that all wounds, old or new, are healed when one enters Thorun's hall, whatever one's rank inside."

"Oh, it is not my own wounds that have brought me here." The big man looked up and turned vacant eyes into the distance. "I have a wife and two little ones, far away. The babies are both sick, they waste and do not grow. The village doctors can do nothing. I pleaded with the gods, offered sacrifice, but the children did not get better." His eyes swung around to Giles, and his fingers moved upon

the handle of his axe. "So I will become a god myself. Then I will be able to make my children well, even if I cannot live with them any longer." His voice was rising and his look had become the stare of a fanatic. "I will kill six men, or sixty if need be! I will kill you, and Thorun himself will not be able to stop me!"

Giles nodded gravely, signifying agreement, keeping his face immobile. Then he turned carefully away. When he glanced back a moment later, Kelsumba was sitting there quietly again, honing his axe.

Thomas the Grabber, who had been standing only a little distance off when Giles made his remark about Vann's ear-cutting propensities, had probably heard the comment. It was Thomas who should be due to oppose the ear-cutter in this day's round of fighting, but Thomas, looking sleepy this morning, seemed not at all disturbed. Now he was yawning, with a kind of cavernous bellow. It was hard to say whether Kelsumba or the Grabber was the biggest of the surviving men. Jud Isaksson was certainly the smallest, with Giles not much larger. The latter sighed once more to himself as he made this assessment.

BREAKFAST consisted of thick tasteless fried cakes and water. For the first time there was no meat. When the men growled at the slave who served them, he indicated by a few grunts and helpless gestures—someone had once cut out his tongue—that nothing better had been provided and he was having to do more work than usual

because most of his fellows had been called away.

Leros confirmed this, scowling as he munched his own share of the fried cakes. "Two priests who are my friends came down to rouse me early this morning, to sympathize with me that most of our retinue has been taken away. There is no excuse for giving us such meager service. True, our numbers are reduced, but the glory of you who survive has grown the greater. I have sent up a protest to the High Priest. I trust we will be better fed, and attended, by midday."

Breakfast, such as it was, having been disposed of, Leros gave the order to march and the party began once more to ascend. Far ahead of them a train of freight wagons loaded with provender for the city went groaning slowly up the road. Another, of empty, rattling carts, came clattering more quickly down. Charles the Upright, who happened to be walking in the van, had to reach for his sword before the surly driver of the first descending cart would lead the train of vehicles fairly off the road to let the climbing heroes pass.

Leros's irritation was increased by the incident, but he said little and the party hiked on. Certainly it was true that they no longer made an impressive sight. The men were all bedraggled after days spent in the field and they were practically unattended. He had felt like stopping to flog that insolent varlet of a driver, but such a job would only demean the whole proceeding further.

The city of Thorun was not yet visible, though the summit of Gods-

mountain could hardly be more than a kilometer above them now. Once Giles caught a glimpse of the huge outworld ship, gleaming wetly on its distant pedestal of rock, but then rain and fog blew in between, and trees closed in again around the road on which they climbed.

Two priests of intermediate rank came down to meet Leros and talk with him. The three of them, conferring privately, walked on ahead of the eight warriors. The eight continued to climb calmly and steadily, sometimes two or three walking together long enough to exchange a few words, sometimes all of them strung out, each in his solitary introspective silence. A ragged pair of slaves, all that remained of their once princely retinue, bore burdens in the rear. One slave was dumb and the other limped on a crippled leg. The image of Thorun, for which a field shrine had been built at every camp thus far, had now been left behind. Temporarily, Leros said, until they should have servants again to build a decent shrine.

Shortly after the near-incident of the carts, Giles the Treacherous sought out Jud Isaksson who had been trudging alone and walked companionably beside the man who in a few hours would be trying to kill him. Jud acknowledged his presence with a glance and then went back to his own thoughts.

Casting a glance back at their beggarly force of servants, Giles remarked: "So, no meat. And it also seems there will be no musicians today, to waft our souls upward to

Thorun's hall."

Jud shrugged uneasily. Perhaps it was only the wet wind blowing rain against his neck that made him do so.

Giles measured out half a dozen strides of road beneath his boots, and then added: "I know only this. Sixty-four brave fighting men, all full of life and blood and valiant deeds, met on the plain below. And now there are just eight of us with breath still in us. *Then*, when we still might have turned around and gone home, we were greeted and praised as heroes. Now? No one beholds our deeds, or will ever sing of them. And are the dead fifty-six in truth now at their feasting up above?" He looked toward the mountaintop concealed amid its groves. "I hear no sounds of laughter down the wind."

Jud's mustache moved, but he only spat.

Giles was determined not to let things drag on; time was growing short. He said, trying almost at random now to provoke a reaction: "You and I have seen those fifty-six good men go up in smoke. No, not even that. They have not all been burnt, as heroes should be, but buried for the most part like dead animals. In shallow graves."

"Man." Jud found his voice at last. "Man, I know not why you rehearse these things to me. Tell me—I know nothing of you but your name—is it for no reason at all that you are called Giles the Treacherous?"

"That is a long story, and not too easy of belief. I will begin it if you like."

"No, I care not. A true scoundrel

would probably call himself Giles the Honest. All right!" Jud came visibly to a decision. "All right! If you want plain speaking. A child should know there are no gods on top of this mountain, or anywhere else. That being so, who really does rule the Temple, Godsmountain, the world? The simple answer is, that they are ruled by men."

He nodded, smiling with satisfaction at his own logic, and then plunged on. "Very well. Since we're not going to be welcomed into some imaginary hall, the question arises, why are we here? There must be a real reason. T'would be senseless to have us kill one another off to the last man for the amusement of a few outworlders who happened by. No. Mark my words. Before this day's duelling starts—or at worst before it's over—the six or eight of us who're left will be let in on the secret, and the Tournament will be secretly stopped."

"You really think that."

"Man, what else? We're going into some elite, secret force. They've already stopped sending down supplies for us right? The Tournament will be halted, and some story put out telling who the final winner was and how he's happily guzzling and wenching with the gods."

"The good Leros must be an excellent actor."

"Maybe he hasn't been told. A good man and all that, but not the brightest. It's plain enough if you only look at it, consider all the facts. We're going into some kind of palace guard, for the High Priest and whoever else is really running things atop this mountain."

When Jud fell silent, Giles also had no more to say for a little while, though he was thinking rapidly. At last he replied: "You may be right. I only know that I would give much to be able to turn my own steps quietly downhill at this moment and retrace them to my home."

"You speak madness, Giles. Once you have come this far they would never let you go. Where is your home?"

"Endross Swamp." It was a remote province, far to the south. "The writ of Godsmountain does not run there with much effect."

"So I have heard. In fact I would have thought that place was full of Thorun's enemies." Jud was staring at him. "Why are you here?"

"I am no enemy of Thorun," Giles said at once, and firmly. "It may be that some of his priests are not as worthy and honest as they should be. As to why I am here, well, I am now asking that question of myself."

Up ahead the priests had stopped, still deep in their discussion. Leros was gesturing angrily, while the other two appeared unhappy but resigned. They had reached the next ring prepared for fighting. Giles saw that it had been made with a portion of its rim overlooking an almost precipitous slope. As he stared, he felt a chill sensation near his heart. In the south they thought that meant a man had laid eyes on the place where he would die.

"What did I tell you?" Jud was murmuring, nudging Giles with an elbow. Leros had turned around as they came up, and was about to speak to the warriors. But some-

thing in Leros's attitude had changed, and they all recognized at once that he was not simply going to announce another round of fighting. Something else impended.

LEROS was angry, but not at the warriors, not at the gloomy priests who stood beside him. When he spoke his voice was tense. "First I am instructed to ask, whether, when the outworlders were with us yesterday, any of them mentioned the name of the demi-god Karlsen."

The warriors all exchanged mildly puzzled looks. Most of them could not remember anything the outworlders had said: they all had more important things to think about. This was hardly the announcement Jud had expected, and he was frowning.

All were silent until Giles put up a hand and asked: "Good Leros, are these outworlders then accused of some blasphemy?"

"That is being decided up above," said one of the other priests, gesturing toward the summit.

"Tell Andreas to decide it up there, then," said Leros tartly. "And let me get on with more important business here."

"Lord Leros, your pardon. I repeat again, I and many others are sympathetic to your views. I am only relaying orders—"

"Yes." Again Leros addressed the waiting warriors. "Those above see fit to bother us with a second triviality. One of the outworlders, the one who behaved like a frightened woman when he saw

blood, has wandered off. It is thought he must still be on the mountain, for soldiers patrolling in the flatlands have not found him. I must ask whether any of you have caught sight of such a person either last night or today."

Giles signed that he had not. The other seven, by now were almost totally uninterested, also gave mutely negative responses.

Leros turned back to the other priests. "Do not these outworlders carry devices for talking one to the other, even when they are kilometers apart? How can one be lost if he can tell the others where he is?"

One of the other priests said: "Such a device was found near their ship. The coward must have dropped it. Anyway, in my opinion he does not want to be found. Other even stranger things were found there also, and there is more going on than we have been told." The priest's voice dropped almost to a whisper. Giles feigned a boredom as great as that of the other fighting men around him, and he kept his eyes on a little flying creature in a tree, but meanwhile his ears grasped for every word.

The priest continued his private—he thought—conversation with Leros: "The other outworlders are said to be guests in the Temple precincts but no one believes they remain there by choice. Very few people have seen them since they entered. One of their women seems to be confined aboard their ship. More, and stranger—one that I shall not name has told me of a most surprising rumor; the demi-god Mjollnir went forth to chal-

lenge the outworlders, and one of them slew him."

Leros made a disgusted sound and turned his back. "And I had been on the verge of giving credence to these stories you bring."

"Oh, I do not credit that about Mjollnir myself. Certainly not! Blasphemous. But something strange is going on, something to do with the outworlders, and we have not been told the truth about it."

"That may well be. But it has nothing to do with me or with this Tournament." Leros squinted up the road. "When may we expect better food and drink, and some new servants?"

The third priest looked unhappier than before. "Lord Leros, again I must give you an answer that you will not like."

Leros swung around. "What now?" His tone was ominous.

"It is—as if the Inner Circle has suddenly forgotten about the Tournament. Not simply that they are busy with other things, but that they no longer care about it. I could get no promise that the rations sent down would be improved. Andreas I saw only briefly, and he was pre-occupied with other matters, I know not what. He said to me: 'Bid Leros get on with his show, and finish up.' How can I question the High Priest?"

Leros's hand went unthinkingly to his side, where a warrior's belted sword would hang, found only the smooth white priestly robe. "My show? Were those his words?"

"On my honor, they were."

"Well, I can question what Andreas orders." Leros spoke in cold

rage, his words quiet and calculated. "High Priest or not. What else will he take from us? Why not all our slaves and food, why not our clothes and weapons as well?" The other priests looked as if they were trying not to hear. Giles was holding his breath in concentration.

Leros went on: "Is this or is it not supposed to be a Tournament pleasing to Thorun and worthy of him, intended to select a man who is worthy of apotheosis? Are not these eight remaining champions, each and every one, the finest . . ." Words failed Leros for the moment. Indeed he seemed near strangulation. At last he managed to draw a deep breath and resume. "Very well. I must go up and question him myself on these matters. One of you two must stay here for a while, that these men be not left unattended by any of high rank."

Turning then to the eight waiting warriors, Leros lost his scowl and faced them with a sad and loving smile. "Good lords—good men. I must leave you for a while. Do you wish to go on with this round of fighting or wait for my return? I am going up the hill to argue for better treatment. There is no telling when I will get back."

The men looked at one another uncertainly. Giles almost spoke, and then bit back the words. His mind was racing, trying to balance probabilities. He wanted a delay, but not too much of one.

Leros, seeing their uncertainty, glanced at the high bronze shield that was Hunters' sun trying to burn its way through layers of mist. "Wait until the hour of noon," he told them. "If I am not back by

then, with better honors and provisions for you—or have not sent word—then fight on as best you can." Handing over his list of names to the priest who had been chosen to stay with the men, and beckoning the others to come along, he started at a brisk pace up the hill.

THE long morning dragged slowly by. Until the middle of the day the warriors stood or lounged around, gloomily silent or conversing two or three together in low voices. At last, when it was plain that noon had come and gone and there had been no word from Leros and no sign of his return, the substitute priest cleared his throat and called the eight together. In a somewhat awkward little speech he introduced himself as Yelgir, and announced that he was ready to call the roll if they were prepared to fight.

"Let us get on with it," said Vann the Nomad. Others nodded their readiness. Waiting and uncertainty were harder to bear than blows. They took their places around the ring.

Yelgir took out the roll of names and cleared his throat once more. "Charles the Upright—Farley of Eikosk."

From their opposite sides of the ring Charles and Farley advanced in almost leisurely fashion. In the center they touched weapons carefully, each man showing respect for the other's abilities, and began a cautious sparring. Farley's wounded left hand, that Leros himself had neatly splinted and bandaged, did

not appear to be causing him any trouble except that he opened the fight with sword alone, leaving his dagger in his belt.

Gradually the fighters added speed and strength to their movements until the long swords rang musically. The contest seemed quite even between them. Then Farley's jewel-bright steel dipped in a flashy feint he had not used in any earlier round of fighting. Charles tried to parry the stroke that did not come, and missed the deadly one that did; he fell to earth with one bright shriek of pain.

"Giles the Treacherous—Jud Isaksson."

Jud, as before, charged out quickly. Giles did not seem nearly so eager, but still this fight began at a faster tempo than had the previous one. Both men were active, but neither would commit himself utterly to an attack. Now Giles became the more aggressive; his long sword lanced above and below the smaller man's round shield, but did not manage to get around it. And now Isaksson's blows fell thick and fast and Giles was forced to spend his energy in parrying, and then to give ground before the onslaught.

The end came suddenly when Giles was backed against the rim of the fighting circle that overhung the downhill slope. Jud's blade flashed, a mere glint of light, and Giles clutched at his chest, gave a choked cry, fell. On the steep turfy incline his body slid and tumbled a score of meters before a bush caught and held it momentarily. Then it pulled loose and slid on again. The priest beckoned. The

limping slave with the maul began the long climb down.

"Omir Kelsumba—Rahim Sosias."

The black giant seemed to grow even larger upon entering the ring. Again he carried his great axe cradled in his two arms almost tenderly. Against him, fat Sosias with his curved sword looked terribly overmatched. But the scimitar drew first blood. It was a light wound, a mere touch with the point along the outside of Kelsumba's thigh. Sosias's timing had been perfect; the riposte with the axe only tore the edge of his loose outer garment.

The wound galvanized the black man, and now Sosias had to go jumping back, paunch jiggling as he danced with marvelous speed. Shift and flash went the axe, and shift and flash again, moving with the speed and control of a light sword, though the heaviest sword could not have held it in a parry. A light murmur of awe went around the watching circle.

Sosias tried the cut at the thighs again, or feinted doing so. This time the riposte came out a little farther after him, yet he miraculously managed to cut his own movement short at the critical instant and slide away untouched. His concealed knife had come out into his left hand, but he was unable now to get close enough to use it.

It would be suicidal to simply wait and try to keep dodging that axe. Sosias must try to attack again, and at last the great axe caught him coming in, and wiped away his face. Thomas the Grabber, leaning on his spear some

ten meters distant, felt warm drop-lets of blood splash on his arm.

“THOMAS the Grabber—Vann the Nomad.”

Vann with his clumsy-looking grip on his long sword faced Thomas, who probingly sent his huge spear darting out and back. Vann wasted no energy in trying to behead the spear, the armored shaft of which had proved itself already in several fights. The fight developed quite slowly at first, both men moving cautiously, with many feints and no real effort at attack.

After a while it became apparent to expert eyes—no other kind were watching now—that Vann could not entirely rid himself of the affectation of holding his sword awkwardly between exchanges. Certainly he got it back into the proper position with amazing speed, but the fraction of a heartbeat wasted in this correction was more than could be spared in competition at this level. The awkward grip was not a natural attitude for Vann, like Kelsumba's peculiar way of holding his axe, but a pose practiced to put an opponent off guard. As such it was utterly useless now, as Vann knew full well; he did not want to use it, but his nerves and muscles would forget and fall into the pattern.

Thomas timed this lapse and recovery several times, then caught the long sword drooping on the downbeat. With a sound like a club's impact the spear rammed through Vann's tattered shirt and torso, a little above his trophied belt. Vann's face bore a look of wit-

less grief when he saw the bright fountain of his own blood, then bore no expression at all.

FARLEY of Eikosk, departing from that deadly ring in the company of his three peers, to resume their slow trek up the mountain, was bothered by the eerie feeling that the gods had forgotten the surviving handful of them. Glancing back over his shoulder from the next bend in the road, he saw the stiffening bodies of the day's four victims laid out beside the ring, and a single gray-garbed figure with a maul at its belt beginning to dig the modest pit that would be their grave. Isaksson, walking beside Farley, kept glancing back also, and Isaksson, too, seemed perturbed about something. Farley almost tried to speak of his troubled feelings, but then said nothing, being unsure of how to put them into words.

AFEW paces ahead, Omir Kelsumba, his huge axe clean and sheathed and innocent as some woodcutter's implement, went up the endless-seeming hill with easy strides. His thoughts were far away, with his small unhealthy children and his wife. Someday, if he won the Tournament, he could perhaps return to see his family, drifting as a spirit on the night wind, or coming with changed appearance as a casual traveler. Everyone knew that gods could do such things, and when he had won the Tournament he would be almost a god.

Earlier there had been occasional

doubts, but now the conviction had returned that he was going to win. He waxed stronger with every victory. He could feel the god-strength mounting in him. Since he had reached his full growth, no man had ever been able to stand against him, and none could now. When the Tournament was over he would be a god, and gods could heal as well as murder. When he took his seat at Thorun's right hand the goddess of healing could not refuse to grant him healing for his children. No child of a god was ever done to death in a hovel by ill luck or mean diseases.

WALKING beside Omir Kelsumba, but guessing nothing of his thoughts, Thomas the Grabber went up with him stride for stride. Despite a lifetime of violence as bandit, soldier, bodyguard, and bounty hunter of dangerous men, Thomas still fell from time to time into the grip of an almost paralyzing fear of bodily injury and death. Iron control was needed to keep his fear from showing. The fear was on him now, and a premonition that he must lose in his next fight. There was nothing in sight for him beyond the wide blade of Kelsumba's axe, at which he dared not look. Thomas was experienced enough with this kind of fear to know that it would pass if only he could manage to hold out against it until he had actually entered the ring with his opponent. Then things would be all right, there would be no time for fear. No one could stand against him then. Now as he climbed he held on

grimly to his nerve, trying to think of nothing.

THE road came to the twin towers from which sentinels saluted gravely as the fighters passed.

"The gods' private park," Thomas muttered aloud, looking around him as they continued. The road was wider now, bordered with fine gravel walks, beyond which cultivated green ground-cover vines made one continuously inviting couch.

"Yes," said Farley of Eikosk's reverent voice behind him. "I suppose we might see Thorun himself among those trees."

No one answered. Shortly Yelgir, their escorting priest, signalled for a halt, and led them a little distance off the road. The ground of softer than before, its area smaller. The night was quiet when it came, still as the grave, or nearly so.

IX

SCHOENBERG, De La Torre, Athena, and Celeste were returned to their comfortable private rooms after the feast, but they were kept under guard every step of the way and all pretense that they were free agents had been dropped. No one was manhandled, but all were searched and their communicators taken from them.

None would speak to them; Andreas had left and no one else was willing to answer their protests and questions.

While they were being led from the Temple back to their rooms

there was time to exchange a few words. Schoenberg advised his shipmates: "Whatever it is they want, they'll tell us when they're ready. Meanwhile it's important that we all keep our heads."

"We'll back you up, Oscar," Athena told him. Behind her determined face, those of Celeste and De La Torre were pale and frightened.

Schoenberg winked at her. Then they were put firmly into their separate rooms. He could hear his door being locked and barred. His personal servant had disappeared and when he peered out through the grillwork of the window he saw that a guard had been stationed outside his door. Schoenberg stretched out on the comfortable bed and tried to think. After a while he got up and tried tapping messages on the stone wall between his room and Athena's, but there was no reply. Probably, the masonry was too thick.

Surprisingly, he slept well and felt reasonably rested when he was awakened early in the morning. An escort of soldiers had come to take him to Andreas. He went with them eagerly. They re-entered the Temple by another of its back doors and again went down some steps, this time to a cell-like stone chamber into which gray morning light filtered through a single high window. Andreas was seated behind a table. Schoenberg's escort saluted and went out; he and the ancient and ugly High Priest were left alone. Andreas was the thinner of the two, and biologically much the older, but he wore a dagger at the girdle of his purplish robe, and seemed utterly unconcerned about being

left alone with a bigger and stronger man who had just become his enemy.

Even before the door had closed behind the soldiers, Schoenberg spoke. "If you are wise, Andreas, you will free us at once."

Andreas calmly gestured to a chair, but Schoenberg remained standing. The High Priest then said: "Before I can dismiss your guards I must have assurance that you are going to cooperate in the project in which we are going to use your ship. Your willing cooperation will be a great help, though not essential."

"Imprisoning me and my friends does not make me want to cooperate. What about the other two members of my party—what has happened to them?"

Andreas folded his hands on the table before him. "The girl is confined to her stateroom on your ship. She is there to speak reassuringly over ships' radio, on the remote chance that another spaceship should appear and attempt to contact the *Orion*."

"Last night your people threatened her, frightened her, so that when she spoke to me she dared not tell me what had happened."

"She has seen the wisdom of cooperation." Andreas spoke mildly. "As for the coward, he is still missing. Probably he will come to no great harm, and will be back looking for food today or tomorrow. I am not going to demean my warriors by ordering them to search for him."

After a moment's silence Schoenberg took the chair that had been offered to him earlier. "What

exactly do you want me to do?"

"Answer some questions about your ship, its drive in particular, and move the ship for us when the time comes."

There was a little pause. "You will have to tell me more than that. I do not want to get into serious trouble with the outworld authorities."

The High Priest shook his head. "Right now I am the only authority with whom you must concern yourself. Those outside this planet may be powerful in their own worlds, but they would not care much what happens here, even if they could know."

Schoenberg relaxed a trifle, crossed one leg over the other. "That is half true, Andreas. They do not care about such hunting trips as mine, not really. Not enough to take the time and trouble to prevent them. They would not care much about my standing and watching your Tournament—or even taking part in it, if I could have been so honored. But they will care, believe me, if I should take part in one of your wars, using outworld weapons, or even using the ship to help you in any military way. Doing any such thing would be a grave risk for me; not a battle-risk, understand, which a man should welcome, but a social risk when I have returned to my own people, a risk of dishonor. Being an honorable man yourself, you will appreciate why I cannot help you."

"I assure you most solemnly, no one outside this planet will ever know what you do here."

"Excuse me, but I doubt that. I am not the only hunter to come to

this planet, and sooner or later a trader or a military ship will call. Your enemies on this planet cannot be entirely silenced, and they will not miss the chance to complain about the spaceship that, unprovoked, molested them, and it will be discovered that the ship was mine. I mention these facts first, because you may not believe me when I tell you that, in any case, the Earth authorities will be concerned if I fail to return from this trip on time." Schoenberg lifted his arm casually and briefly glanced at his calendar watch.

Andreas smiled slightly. "No one on Earth or any of the other worlds knows where you are. Whatever search is made for you will not be on my planet."

SCHOENBERG did not hesitate for a moment. So far he had not shown the slightest sign of fear. "It will be your mistake, High Priest, if you do not believe me. But never mind that now. Let us return to what you want. Say that I am now sitting in the command chair in the control room of my ship with you presumably leaning over me and holding a knife against my throat. Where to?"

"Schoenberg, I am not literally going to hold a knife against your throat. Not in your control room anyway, where you might be tempted to push something the wrong way in an effort to disrupt my plans. There is a priest here who has been aboard spaceships before, and we are not so utterly ignorant of them as you might suppose . . . I had thought you might

be willing to join in a military sort of adventure. De La Torre would be, but he is ignorant. I have questioned the other people of your party, and believe them when they say they know nothing about the ship's drive, nor of pilotage."

"That is correct. I am the only pilot here."

"Tell me, for my curiosity, how could they have gotten home if a glacier-beast had killed you?"

"Autopilot could handle that. Just punch in a destination, and it'll deliver you in-system, near any civilized world you want. Your priest who's been aboard space-ships must know that. I take it you want some other kind of piloting."

"Yes. But mainly some detailed information about the drive."

"Tell me what it's all about and maybe I'll provide that information."

Andreas's eyes probed at him, not fiercely but deeply, for what seemed a long time. "Perhaps that would be best." The old priest sighed. "Perhaps other ways . . . tell me, what effect do threats of torture and maiming have upon you?"

Schoenberg half rose, and leaned forward glaring. "High Priest, I am a powerful man out there, in the big world that holds your little world surrounded. Do you think that just anyone can possess his own starship and take it where he likes? I have made it in the interest of several other powerful and ruthless people to look out for my safety, to avenge my death or disappearance. And those people *do* know exactly where I am and when I am due to return. For every dol of pain

you make me suffer, you will feel two, or perhaps ten, of one kind of pain or another. My friends and I can pull down your city and your Temple if you provoke us to it. Now threaten me no more!"

The two men's eyes were still locked when there came a tap at the door and it opened and one of the Inner Circle put in his head, making a slight nodding signal to Andreas. Other business called.

The High Priest sighed and arose. Smiling, skull-faced, he bowed his head very slightly in salute to Schoenberg. "You are a hard man to frighten, outworlder. Nevertheless I think it will be worthwhile to do so. Think for a while on what I have said, and shortly we will talk again."

SUOMI was afraid. He was not simply afraid of being caught by Andreas's soldiers, who yesterday had taken the ship and Barbara and had no doubt also swept up the four other unsuspecting outworlders with little difficulty. No, the night in the thicket had given Suomi plenty of time to think and there was a lot more to it than that.

Hours ago he had left the thicket where yesterday his flight had come to an exhausted halt. Now he was crouched in the poor concealment of some thin, bush-like vegetation near the road that climbed the mountain, watching and waiting—for what he was not exactly sure. He had vague hopes of spying some lone traveler whom he might approach in hopes of getting some kind of help.

Alternatively he imagined another pack train of the kind he had already seen, passing by, and a convenient bag of vegetables or haunch of meat tumbling forgotten to the road, where he might spring out a minute later to grab it up. He had as yet found nothing very palatable in the woods and thickets, and so he had not eaten anything worth mentioning in more than a standard day.

He was also thirsty, despite the rainwater he had licked from some dripping leaves, and he was limping fairly badly from yesterday's fall. His back bothered him, and he thought that one of the minor cuts on his leg might be infected, despite the routine immunological precautions taken before leaving Earth.

The thicket into which he had burrowed himself when he stopped running was so dense and extensive that it seemed possible that a man might stay there undiscovered—until it pleased his pursuers to detail a hundred men or so to hunt him out. But perhaps Suomi had no pursuers. On this alien planet he had literally nowhere to go. He suspected strongly that his continued freedom, if it could be called that, was due only to the fact that no particular effort had been made to round him up. He could not believe that the warriors of Hunters' were particularly afraid of dying by his rifle, so it must be that they were not hunting him because more important things were going on.

Realizing that he could not accomplish anything there he had left the thicket. There was a warning to be spread. At moments it seemed

possible that the whole thing had been no more than a monstrous practical joke, like an initiation . . . but then he recalled his dark clear thoughts of the night just past, and shivered a little in the warmth of day. It was not only for himself that he feared, and not only for the people who had come with him from Earth. In his mind's eye Suomi could still see with perfect clarity the robot's shattered carapace, the debris of components spilling out. And there, mixed with all the handmade parts . . .

“SOFTLY, outworlder,” said a gentle voice quite close behind him.

He whirled and found he was presenting the rifle at a rather short man with sandy hair, who was standing beside a tree six or eight meters off, muscular arms raised and hands open in an unmistakable gesture of peace. The man wore the gray clothing Suomi had seen on Godsmountain's slaves, and tucked into the heavy rope that served him as a belt was a short massive sledge. The killer of fallen gladiators. The man stood taller than Suomi remembered and also had a more open and attractive face.

“What do you want?” Suomi held the rifle steady, though his gaze went darting around the woods. No one else was in sight; the slave had come here alone.

“Only to talk with you a little.” The man's tone was reassuring. He very slowly lowered his hands but otherwise did not move. “To make common cause with you, if I can, against our common enemies.” He

nodded in an uphill direction.

Did slaves on Hunters' habitually talk like this? Suomi doubted it. He scarcely remembered hearing them talk at all. He did not relax. "How did you find me?"

"I guessed you might be somewhere near the road by this time, thinking about giving up. I have been trying to find you for an hour, and I doubt anyone else has made the effort."

Suomi nodded. "I guessed that much. Who are you? Not a slave."

"You are right, I am not. But more of that later. Come, move back into the woods, before someone sees us from the road."

Now Suomi did relax, lowering the rifle with shaking hands and following the other back into the trees, where they squatted down to talk.

"First, tell me this," the man demanded at once. "How can we prevent Andreas and his band of thieves from making use of your stolen ship?"

"I don't know. Where are my companions?"

"Held in the Temple, under what conditions I am not sure. You don't look good. I would offer you food and drink, but have none with me at the moment. Why do you think Andreas wants your ship?"

"I am afraid." Suomi shook his head. "If it is only Andreas I suppose he has some simple military use in mind to complete his conquest of this planet. He may think our ship carries weapons of mass destruction. It has none."

The man was looking sharply at Suomi. "What did you mean, if it is only Andreas?"

"HAVE you heard of the berserkers?"

A blank look. "Of course, the death machines of legend. What have they to do with this?"

Suomi began to describe his combat with the man-shaped machine. His hearer was ready to listen.

"I heard a rumor that Mjollnir had walked forth to fight, and was slain," the man in gray mused. "So, it was a berserker that you destroyed?"

"Not exactly. Not entirely. Against a true berserker android this rifle would have been useless. But inside the machine's broken body I found this." He drew from his pocket a small sealed box of shiny metal. From the box a thick gray cable emerged, to expand into a fan of innumerable gauze-fine fibers at the point where his force packet had sheared it off. "This is a solid-state electronuclear device, in other words part of an artificial brain. Judging from its size, and the number of fibers in this cable, I would say that two or three of these, properly interconnected, should be enough to control a robot that could do physical things better than a man can do them, and also obey simple orders and make simple decisions."

The man reached for the box and weighed it doubtfully in his hand.

Suomi went on: "Many solid-state electronuclear devices are made on Earth and other technological worlds. I have seen countless varieties of them. Do you know how many I have seen that closely resemble this? Exactly one. I saw that in a museum. It was part of a berserker, captured in a space battle at

the Stone Place, long ago."

The man scratched his chin, and handed back the box. "It is hard for me to take a legend as reality."

Sumoi felt like grabbing him and shaking him. "Berserkers are very real, I promise you. What do you suppose destroyed the technology of your forefathers, here on Hunters'?"

"We are taught as children that our ancestors were too proud and strong to let themselves remain dependent on fancy machines. Oh, the legends tell of a war against berserkers, too."

"It is not only legend but history."

"All right, history. What is your point?"

"That war cut off your ancestors from the rest of the galaxy for a long time and wrecked their technology—as you say, they were rough men and women who found they could get by without a lot of fancy machines. Made a virtue of necessity. Anyway, it has been taken for granted that Karlsen's victory here destroyed all the berserkers on Hunters' or drove them away. But perhaps one survived, or at least its unliving brain survived when the rest of its machinery was crippled or destroyed. Perhaps that berserker is still here."

His auditor was still receptive but unimpressed. Suomi decided that more explanation was in order. He went on: "On other planets there have been cults of evil men and women who have worshipped berserkers as gods. I can only guess that there might have been some such people on Hunters' five hundred years ago. After the battle

they found their crippled god somewhere, rescued it and hid it. Built a secret cult around it, worshipped it in secret, generation after generation. Praying to Death, working for the day when they could destroy all life upon this planet."

The man ran strong-looking, nervous fingers through his sandy hair. "But, if you are right, there was more to it than the figure of Mjollnir? The berserker has not been destroyed?"

"I am sure there is more to it than that. The real berserker brain must have included many more of these small units. And other components as well. Probably it put only spare parts into Mjollnir. Or human artisans did, working at the berserker's direction."

"Then why must there be a true berserker, as you put it, here at all? Andreas has very good artisans working for him. Perhaps they only used parts from destroyed berserkers to build the figure of Mjollnir—and one of Thorun as well." He nodded to himself. "That would explain why men swear they have actually seen Thorun walking with the High Priest in the Temple courtyards."

"Excuse me, but it is not possible that any human artisans on this planet designed the robot that attacked me. No matter what components they had to work with. Can you grasp the programming problems involved in designing a machine to run and fight and climb like a man? Better than a man. No human could have climbed that mesa where the machine did it, in a few minutes, hammering in pitons all the way. And the mechanical en-

gineering difficulties? No. On Earth, Venus, a handful of other planets, there are men and facilities capable of designing such a robot. Only a functioning berserker-brain could do it here."

THE two men were quiet for a little while, both thinking, each studying the other. Suomi eased himself into a different position, sitting with his back against a tree trunk. His wounded leg throbbed. At last the Hunterian said: "Suppose a berserker is here as you say, and the priests of Godsmountain have it. What then?"

"You do not understand!" Suomi almost grabbed him by the ragged shirt to attempt a shaking. "Say rather that it has them. How can I begin to tell you what a berserker is?" He sighed and slumped back, feeling hopeless and exhausted. How to convey, to someone who had never seen even depictions on film or holograph, the centuries of mass destruction berserkers had visited upon the galaxy, the documented cases of individual horrors? Whole planets had been sterilized, whole solar systems laid waste by the unliving enemy. People by the thousands or tens of thousands had perished in berserkers' experiments aimed at discovering what made the strange two-legged Earth-descended blobs of protoplasm so resistant to the fundamental truth-assumption of the berserkers' programming: that life was a disease of matter that had to be expunged. It had all happened here, was still happening somewhere a thousand light years or more away, on the

outer edge of man's little domain within the galaxy.

Suomi said quietly: "If it is true that a berserker has captured our ship then it can be for only one purpose; to somehow sterilize this planet of all life."

"You said there were no mass weapons on the ship!"

"I meant there were none in the usual sense. But there is the drive that brought us between the stars." Suomi considered. "If the ship were buried beneath this mountain, say, and the drive suddenly turned on full force, the mountain might be blown up into the air and everyone on it killed. Not good enough for a berserker, not if it could find a way of doing worse.

"I'll bet that if the drive were worked on cunningly enough some weapon could be made of it that could sterilize a planet. Perhaps by polluting the atmosphere with radioactivity. The weapon wouldn't have to be instantly effective. There probably won't be another interstellar ship here for fifteen standard years. No way for anyone here to call for outside help, even if they understood what was happening."

The man in gray was excited at last. He stood up cautiously and looked about, then squatted down again. He fingered the handle of his maul, as if itching to pull it from his belt and fight. "By all the gods!" he muttered. "It should be effective, whether or not it is the truth!"

"Effective? What should be?"

"It should be effective against Godsmountain's priests, to spread the story that the drive of the captured ship is to be altered, our air

poisoned. That a berserker really rules Godsmountain, and means to destroy the world. If we can convince people of that, we will have them!"

"It is the truth, I believe. But to spread any story across the planet will take far too long."

The man with the maul glanced up toward the mountaintop, invisible beyond the trees. "I do not think we will need to go that far. Now. How to put the story in convincing terms? Let's see. Five hundred standard years ago the berserker fleet was here. The demigod Karlsen drove them out. The priests for some reason have been asking if any of you outworlders mentioned Karlsen; that seems to fit. Now—"

Now Suomi did actually seize him by the shirt, to the Hunterian's great astonishment. "They asked that?" Suomi barked. "Of course it fits!"

For half an hour thereafter they made their plans.

X

THE four remaining contestants were awakened early from their sleep on the soft groundcover of what Thomas the Grabber had called the gods' private park. At dawn there erupted a racket of small winged creatures, each defending his bit of territory against encroachment by the others. Farley of Eikosk, roused by the noise of this miniature Tournament, watched it for a while, and then, with sudden awareness of where he was, turned his gaze uphill through the park-like forest, toward the summit

of the mountain.

There, in the early morning light, the white walls had a dull and ghostly look. Later, he knew, when he saw them in full sunlight, they would shine a dazzling white. All his life he had listened eagerly, whenever he could, to the tales of travelers who had visited this city. To see its white stones actually before him inspired him with awe.

Thorun lived there.

Thorun actually lived there.

From the moment of Farley's awakening on this morning a sense of unreality grew in him rapidly. He could not fully credit his own presence here on the mountaintop, or his success thus far in the Tournament. (How pleased his father would be, at last, if he should be the winner!) This feeling of unreality persisted through the morning ritual of worship, and through their meager breakfast of cold fried cakes left over from the day before. The dumb slave who served them protested with gestures that no dead wood was available here to make a fire for cooking.

The other slave had gone off somewhere, perhaps on a search for wood. Leros still had not returned. The priest Yelgir, who still seemed a stranger to Farley, looked stiff-jointed and disheveled after a night spent in the open. He spoke to them apologetically about the fact that no fighting ring had been prepared here in advance.

Yelgir, in consultation with the warriors, chose a flat area of ground and the slave was set to work stripping away the groundcover and stamping flat the earth as best he could. The task took the

slave several hours, while the others sat watching.

Farley was not exactly impatient, but the delay was one more change in routine, and made everything all the more unreal for him. At last the ring was ready, however. Yelgir was muttering prayers and it was time for the first two men to fight to take their places.

"Farley of Eikosk—Jud Isaks-son."

Now both of them were in the circle from which only one of them could ever walk. But as Jud moved toward him, more slowly than was his wont, it occurred to Farley that death itself might well be different here, almost under the windows of Thorun's hall. Would the loser of this fight really die as men usually did, like some butchered animal? Might he not instead simply look down at his gaping wound, acknowledge defeat with a salute and a courteous nod, and, like one leaving a field of harmless practice, simply walk off yonder through the trees, perhaps to be met halfway by welcoming Mjollnir or Karlsen or even Thorun himself?

In Farley's eyes the scimitar flashed sunlight. Jud was warming up now, starting to come on with his usual fury. Farley suddenly felt free and loose, faster and stronger than ever in his life before. It was as if he now breathed in the immortality of the gods by merely sharing their high air.

He parried the scimitar with a seeming carelessness, that was really something else, and then he stepped in looking for the best way to kill. Now Farley carried his long sword too high, now too low, now

he let his blade stray far aside into what should have been a weak position, until he could almost hear his father shouting at him in anger, but none of this was carelessness. Not today. Whatever tactic his whims, his nerves, chose for him was fated to succeed. His blade always came back into position in time to block the scimitar. On the attack his long sword reached closer and closer to Jud's lifeblood.

To Farley the end seemed foreordained and only the suddenness with which it came surprised him. He stood there almost disappointed that the fight was over, while Jud dying on the ground seemed to be trying to tell him something. Jud's life ran out too quickly, before the words could come.

The priest Yelgir cleared his throat. "Omir Kelsumba—Thomas the Grabber." Today he needed no paper to keep track of names.

Standing to one side, Farley was struck by the realization that in this round, for the first time, there would be no other victors to stand at his side watching with him, now and then passing a joke or a comment on the fight in progress. Watching alone, except for the priest, he beheld a serene happiness on Kelsumba's face; obviously here was another who felt favored by the gods today. Things appeared to be different with Thomas the Grabber. Even before the first blow his expression was that of a man who knows himself defeated.

In the center of the ring the two of them closed promptly. The axe flashed out with reckless confidence with what must be Kelsumba's certainty of approaching godhood.

The spear moved with the speed of desperation, and yet as accurately and steadily as if wielded by a god. Incredibly, the fight was over.

Or was it over? Kelsumba, even with the heavy spear transfixing him, fought on. His axe, though it was much slower now, still rose and fell. Thomas was still unhurt. But instead of backing away and waiting for his man to fall, he chose for some reason to leap in and grab. As the two men wrestled it was still Omir who smiled, and Thomas who looked desperate. But it was quickly demonstrated that Omir was not the stronger of the two, at least not with a spear stuck through him. Only after Thomas had wrenched away the axe and used it for a finishing blow did his face lose its look of desperation.

Now the clangor of arms, that had long since silenced the winged quarreling creatures, was ended also. The forest at last was still.

WHEN Schoenberg was brought before him again, about midday, Andreas was seated as before. As soon as the two of them were left alone, the High Priest began: "Since the thought of torture does not immediately terrify you, and I suspect its application might provoke you to some rash attempt at misinforming us about the ship, I have decided I must take an extreme measure to frighten you sufficiently. You have brought it on yourself." Andreas was smiling again, evidently finding his own wit amusing.

Schoenberg, unimpressed, sat down. "How do you mean to terrify

me, then?" he answered.

"By saying a few words."

"Andreas, my respect for you is fading. If the threats you have already made have not had their desired effect neither will any mutterings about some great unnameable terror. You are not going to scare me that way. In fact you are not going to scare me at all, not in the way you seem to want."

"I think I can. I think I know what a man like you is truly afraid of."

"What?"

"Perhaps I can do it by saying to you only one word." Andreas clapped his hands together playfully.

Schoenberg waited.

"The one word is his name."

"Thorun. I know that."

"No. Thorun is a toy. My god is real."

"Well, then. Utter his terrible name." Schoenberg lifted his eyebrows in almost jaunty inquiry.

Andreas whispered the three syllables.

It took Schoenberg a little while to grasp it. At first he was merely puzzled. "Berserker," he repeated, leaning back in his chair, his face a blank.

Andreas waited, confidently, for his god had never failed him yet.

Schoenberg said: "You mean . . . ahhh. I think I begin to see. You mean one has really been here for five hundred years, and you—serve it?"

"I am going shortly to offer to the god of Death a special sacrifice, consisting of some people we no longer need, I can show you. You will be convinced."

"Yes, I believe you can show me. I believe you. Well. This puts a different face on things, all right, but not in the way you intended. If I wouldn't help you in a local war, I'm not going to help you in a mass extermination."

"Schoenberg, when we have done with this planet what we will, when it is moribund, my god assures me that the ship's drive can be restored sufficiently to take it out into space again and after a voyage of many years to reach another star whose planets also are polluted by the foul scum of life. I and a few others, members of my Inner Circle, will make this voyage, continuing to bear the burden of hideous life on our own bodies that we may free many others of it on other worlds. There are emergency recycling systems on your ship that will nourish us adequately for years.

"The voyage, as I have said, will be many years in duration. Unless you agree to cooperate with me from this moment on you will be brought with us as a prisoner. You will not die. There are ways of preventing suicide, my master assures me, things he can do to your brain when he has time to work on it.

"You will be useful on the voyage, for we will have need of a servant. You will not be tortured—I mean, not much at any one time. I will see to it that your sufferings never become sharp enough to set one day of your existence apart from another. I may die before the voyage is over, but some of my associates are young men and they will follow my orders faithfully. You Earthmen are very long-lived, I understand. I suppose you will—

what did the old Earthmen call it?—go mad. No one will ever admire your exploits. There will be none to admire. But I suppose you might continue to exist to an age of five hundred years."

Schoenberg had not moved. Now a muscle twitched in his right cheek. His head had bowed a very little, his shoulders were a little lower than before.

Andreas said: "I would much prefer to see you make a sporting finish, myself. Go out with a noble gesture. If you cooperate in my plans, a different future for you might be arranged. You will only be helping us to do what we are going to do anyway.

"If you cooperate, I will give you"—Andreas held up a hand, thumb and forefinger barely separated—"just a *little* chance, at the very end. You will not win, but you will die nobly in the attempt."

"What kind of chance?" Schoenberg's voice was low and desperate now. He blinked repeatedly.

"Give you a sword, let you try to hack your way past one of my fighting men, to get to the berserker and cut it into bits. Its cabling would be quite vulnerable to such an attack."

"You wouldn't really do that! It is your god."

Andreas waited calmly.

"How do I know that you would really do that?" The words burst out as if involuntarily.

"You know now what I will do if you do not cooperate."

The silence in the little room stretched on and on.

ONLY three men, not counting a slave or two, now remained on

their feet under the pleasant trees of the gods' otherwise deserted park. Farley and Thomas stood facing each other, their eyes meeting like those of two strangers encountering each other by chance in a wilderness both had thought uninhabited. In the background the priest was giving orders to the slaves; there was the chunk of a shovel starting a new grave.

Farley looked down at what lay on the ground. Jud had not smiled at his wound and gone off on a blithe stroll among the trees. Kelsumba was not laughing on his way to an eternal feast with gods. Farley did not care to stay and watch them rolled into a little pit. Feeling a slow emergence from his sensation of invulnerability, he turned and started on the uphill road once more.

Thomas the Grabber, still wiping at his spear, came along silently and companionably. They left the priest behind. Here the pavement of the road was very smooth and well maintained, and it was neatly bordered with stones in a pattern that put Farley in mind of certain formal walks on his father's large estate.

Now, with what seemed to Farley stunning ordinariness, they were coming through the last trees of the forest and around the road's last curve. Vistas opened, and gardens and orchards were visible in the distance to either side. Ahead, the road ran straight across thirty or forty meters of well-tended lawn, and then it entered the citadel-city of the gods. The gate by which it entered, of massive timbers banded with wrought metal, was tightly

closed just now. The high wall of the city was a blinding white in the sun, and Farley was now close enough to see how huge and heavy its stones were. He wondered how they had been stained or painted to make them look like bone.

But nothing happened inside him when he beheld their goal, the place where Thorun dwelled. Immortality was draining from him rapidly.

"Thomas," he said, slowing to a halt. "The whole thing is too—ordinary."

"How's that?" asked Thomas, amiably, stopping at his side.

Farley paused. How to explain his disappointment? He could not understand it well himself. He said what came to his tongue, which was only: "There were sixty-four of us, and now there are only two."

"But how else could it have worked out?" Thomas asked reasonably.

A few weeds grew through the rocks beside Thorun's gateway. Lumps of the dried dung of some pack animal lay at the roadside. Farley threw back his head and closed his eyes. He groaned.

"What is it, friend?"

"Thomas, Thomas. What do you see here, what do you feel? Suddenly I am having doubts." He looked at his companion for help.

Thomas shook his head. "Oh my friend, there is no doubt at all about our future. You and I are going to fight, and then only one of us is going living through that gate."

There was the gate, tough ordinary wood, bound with bands of wrought metal, its lower parts

showing a little superficial wear from the brushing passages of countless men and women, slaves and animals. Behind such a gate there could be nothing but more of the same world in which Farley now stood, in which he had lived all his life. And if he reached the gate of the Temple inside, would it be any different?

The priest Yelgir, whom they had left behind, came on now to pass them, giving Farley an uneasy smile as he did so. Evidently some unseen watcher within the walls noted the priest's approach, for now the gate was opened slightly from within. Another priest stuck out his head and sized up Farley and Thomas with an impersonal look. "Is either of them wounded?" he asked Yelgir.

"One has a damaged hand, and cannot use his dagger, but that seems to bother him very little. The other a sliced arm. The muscle is not cut, nothing serious." The two priests began a low-voiced conversation that Farley could not quite hear. Meanwhile other heads, obviously aristocratic, began to appear along the top of the wall, their owners evidently standing on some high walkway on the inner side. The two finalists of Thorun's Tournament were being stared at like slaves on auction. Thomas the Grabber finished wiping his spear and now stood leaning on it, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and sighing.

"Bid the two contestants wait," someone was calling carelessly from inside. "The High Priest sends word that he hopes to attend the final duel, but he is busy now with

some special sacrifice to the gods."

XI

SUOMI, after his talk with the Sman in gray (whose name he had never learned), breathed a sigh of relief mingled with exhaustion when he had gotten as far as the foot of the little mesa without being discovered and seized by Andreas's men. Suomi had to somehow manage to get himself into the ship again, before he could hope to accomplish anything. He must not be captured before he reached the mesa.

According to the gauge on the breech of his rifle, it had power left for only six shots. He might have thrown away the weapon in the woods, except for his fear that some fool might find it and kill himself or someone else by accident. He had offered the rifle to the man in gray, when they were about to part, but the offer was refused.

"I must continue to pass as a slave," the Hunterian had said. "No slave could carry such a device into the city without immediately being questioned. Besides, I am unfamiliar with its use; better each man to his own weapons."

"Each to his own," Suomi had answered, reaching out for a farewell handshake. "Good luck with yours. I hope I meet you in the city above."

Now, at the foot of the mesa, he observed that a regular trail had already been worn, leading from the lower end of the climbing path off into the woods uphill in the direction of the city. He observed also that not a trace remained of

the shattered robot; at first he could not even locate the place where it had lain. Then he realized that the massive tree, whose surface his rifle fire had splintered, had been removed. Here was the neatly sawn stump, with dirt rubbed on the cut surface so it would not look fresh. The tree itself had somehow been carried away. Great pains were being taken to eliminate all evidence that anything grotesque had happened here. But a number of men must have been involved in the cleanup and at least one of them must have talked, so the man in gray had rumors to build on. So much the better.

When he got to the bottom of the climbing path, Suomi did shrug out of the rifle's strap and let the weapon fall aside. Gratefully he saw that the climbing rope was still in place. Fighting down a foolish impulse to turn at the last moment and run away to cower in the woods once more, he gritted his teeth and gripped the rope and began to climb. Weakened and aching, he was now compelled to hang on with both hands even on the easy first part of the slope, where before he had been able to climb rapidly on legs alone.

He had gotten only a little way up when a soldier came into view, looked down and saw Suomi, and began shouting. Suomi ignored the shouts and continued to struggle slowly upward. The shouting kept on. Suomi looked up and saw that the man had a spear raised as if ready to throw.

"If you stick me with that thing," Suomi yelled back at last, "you'll have to carry me. Look at

me. Am I so dangerous that I frighten you?"

His belly muscles were tensing against the impact of the spear, but it did not come. The voice stopped shouting, moved away just a little, and began to talk. Other male voices answered. Suomi did not pay much attention to what they were saying, and did not look up again. Dizzy with hunger and fatigue, feverish from his infected wound, he struggled on the rocks for what seemed an endless time before he could pull himself out on the flat horizontal surface at the head of the path.

The foam mattress lay almost under his feet when he stood up but there was no sign of Barbara. Half a dozen men, four soldiers and two priests in purple-trimmed robes, crowded around Suomi, barking threats and orders at him, almost nudging him off the mesa again with their drawn swords and a leveled spear. Finally one of the aristocrats raised his voice and there was order. The soldiers put down their weapons, rapidly stripped Suomi and searched him, then searched through his clothes and tossed them back to him.

"What've you done with the girl who was here?" he asked while this was going on. No one bothered to answer.

"Bring him inside the ship," one of the aristocrats ordered the soldiers.

"We'd better get on the communicator first and ask Andreas," the other one advised. After a moment's debate they compromised and had Suomi brought up the landing ramp as far as the open en-

trance lock. There they left him standing for the moment, with two soldiers gripping his arms. His guards were unusually large, strong men, and once the initial confusion of his capture was over they obeyed orders with precision and alertness.

Suomi wished he could sit down, but was not quite certain that he would be able to get up again if he did. He could hear voices from the direction of the control room engaged in what sounded like a talk on the communicator between the ship and somewhere else. Andreas's prize-crew perhaps had more technological savvy than Suomi had assumed. So much the worse.

In a little while one of the aristocrats came back from the direction of the control room to stand in front of Suomi and regard him critically. "Andreas is busy with sacrifice. I think we'll just bring this one on board, and confine him to his old stateroom. The place has been searched a dozen times, there are no weapons. Outworlder, you look in a bad way."

"If I could have some food . . ."

"We won't starve you to death, I don't suppose. Though you may wish we had." He signed to the soldiers to bring Suomi on into the ship.

At the entrance to the control room the aristocrat turned. "Hold him tightly going through here."

They brought him into the control room, and they were quite right to make sure that he was held securely. Otherwise it might have been barely possible for him to lunge at the drive controls and, before he could be stopped, wreck the ship. But there was no hope of that,

his arms were pinned in grips he could not have broken on his strongest days, of which this was not one.

Seated in the large central pilot's chair was another aristocratic priest.

ON A screen before him were the faces of two men who seemed to be in some dimly lighted stone chamber. The one in the background was another priest. The one in front was Schoenberg.

"Now," the priest in the control chair was saying, addressing the screen, "You say that if the ship pitches more than ten degrees while under manual control, the autopilot will cut in automatically?"

"Yes," Schoenberg's image said on the screen. "Provided the artificial gravity is off. Then ten degrees pitch and you'll get the autopilot."

"Schoenberg!" Suomi cried out. "Don't fly it for them, Schoenberg, it's a berserker they're working for. Don't do anything they want!"

Schoenberg's face showed a reaction, though only a trivial one, and his eyes moved, probably following Suomi's passage through the control room on a portable screen taken from the ship. The men transporting Suomi were making no particular effort to hush him up or hurry him along.

"A berserker, Schoenberg!"

Schoenberg's eyes on the screen closed. His face looked deathly tired. His voice came wearily into the ship. "I know what I'm doing, Suomi. Just go along with them. Don't make things more difficult than they are."

Suomi with his escort passed out of the control room and into the narrow passage leading to the state-rooms, moving at a brisk pace. The doors of most of the rooms and compartments stood open, revealing scenes of disorder, but that of the room that had been Barbara's was closed. A bored-looking soldier stood leaning against it from the outside.

"Is the girl in there?" Suomi asked. Again no one would answer. He supposed that at this stage it made no difference whether she was or not.

His captors knew somehow which room was his—perhaps they had found his name on something there, perhaps Schoenberg for whatever reason was telling them every small detail. When they thrust Suomi into the room he found it in the same state of disruption as the others he had seen, which was no more than might have been expected after several thorough searches. There was no sign that anything had been wantonly smashed. So much the better.

They left him alone and closed the door behind him; no doubt there would be a soldier leaning against it on the outside. Since the room had not been designed as a prison cell, its door could be locked only from the inside. Unfortunately it had not been designed as a fortress either; though the door was thick and soundproof, it could probably be forced open quickly by a couple of armed and determined men. Nevertheless Suomi quietly activated the lock.

He went then to stand beside his bunk, where an intercom control

was set into the wall, and paused with his hand upraised. He could try to reach Barbara this way. But what could he say? Some of the enemy might well be in her room listening. To try to reassure her, to offer hope, might be much worse than useless. He turned the intercom to a position where it would receive but not transmit and left it there.

The next thing he did was to get himself a long drink of cold water from the little sink. Then he opened the medicine chest, selected an antibiotic and a painkiller. There also he found a medicated dressing to put on the worst of his minor wounds, the leg gash that somehow had become infected. After that, with a single glance of longing at the comfortable bunk, he walked to the little desk-work-bench where he had kept his personal cameras and sound-recording gear. This material, like everything else, had been looked at and scattered. He opened drawers, looked in corners, searching. All was in disarray, but it seemed that nothing he needed had been removed or broken. He uttered a sigh of relief that broke off midway as he entered a new phase of tension.

It was time to sit down and get to work.

IN ITS buried shrine far below the Temple the berserker perceived the chanting far above of five familiar male voices. From the same location came the sounds of the shuffling of fourteen human feet, in a pattern consistent with that of one of the processions with

which the humans habitually began their sacrificial rituals. Routine analysis of the sounds allowed the berserker to identify among the members of the procession not only five of its familiar servitors but two other human organisms, one male and one female, that were strangers to it.

Compulsively but still routinely, the berserker concentrated all its senses upon the unknown male, who was now stumbling slightly on bare feet at the top of the long stone stair that must be unfamiliar to him, as the procession began its descent from Thorun's temple. As it would have done with any strange male, the berserker was attempting an identification with another whose personal patterns were carried under highest priority in its data banks.

Since its crippling and near-destruction in the battle 502.78 . . . standard years ago the berserker's senses had been blurred and uncertain, hardly better than human sight and hearing. But the procession was bringing the unknown male nearer and nearer now, and the probability of his being identified with the prime target patterns was rapidly declining to a negligible level. The berserker was free to turn its attention to other matters.

In the electronuclear mind of the berserker there was no wonder and no impatience, but there was definitely an awareness that some events were far more probable than others. In that sense therefore the berserker was surprised when it computed that today two human victims were to be offered to it instead of one, or an animal only, as

often happened.

In all the time since the battle in which it was damaged, since the human goodlife on this planet had rescued it from destruction and begged to offer it worship, the berserker had received such multiple offerings on only a few occasions. Searching back now through its memory banks and comparing data, it noted that these had invariably been times of intense emotion among its devotees.

One such occasion had been the celebration of final victory over a particularly stubborn enemy tribe, a victory attained by following a battle plan computed by the berserker for its worshippers and handed down by it as a divine command. Then seventy-four human organisms, all members of the defeated tribe, had been sacrificed to it in one day. At another time of multiple sacrifice the emotions of those offering it had been much different. Then they were pleading for help, during a period of great food shortage. From that famine the berserker had led its followers and their tribe into a land ripe for plunder, by outlining for them a migration route, using its old battle-maps of the planet's surface. And now it computed that the successful capture of the starship, and the impending completion of the long effort to find a way to sterilize the planet, must also produce intense emotion among this generation of its goodlife servants.

The berserker did not understand emotion, and only when compelled by circumstances would it try to work with what it did not understand. The stimulus-response pat-

terns called fear and lust, for example, seemed at first to be readily computable in humans as well as in less dangerously intelligent animals. But in more than five hundred years of attempting to master human psychology well enough to use these patterns to manipulate human organisms, the berserker had time and again run into depths and complexities of behavior that it could not understand. To accept worship meant trying to use patterns that were, if anything, even deeper and more complex, a tremendously uncertain means of working toward its goal. But no better means had been available, and with the capture of the starship it seemed that this was after all going to prove successful.

Now the procession had completed its descent of the stair, and now it was entering the berserker's chamber. The High Priest Andreas entered first, his vestments for this occasion of red and black, Thorun's white and purple having been put secretly aside above, in Thorun's temple. The robes in which the High Priest now appeared to worship his true god were heavily and ineradicably stained with the rust-brown of old blood.

BEHIND Andreas came Gus De La Torre and Celeste Servetus, their wrists bound behind them, garbed in white and garlanded with live flowers that would soon be scattered on the floor to die. Four priests of the Inner Circle followed, their robes for this special occasion red and black like the High Priest's, and stained like his as well.

Andreas and the other four men conducting the sacrifice began performing the usual prostrations and chanting the usual litanies, while the victims, as usual, watched in uncertainty and mounting fear. The berserker had long ago noted that the words and actions used in these rituals tended to change but little over the standard centuries, the long Hunterian years, only gradually becoming somewhat more elaborate. For the moment it kept quiet. It had realized long ago that the less it said during a sacrificial ceremony, the better. Not only did it thus lessen the risk of confusing and disillusioning its worshippers by saying something out of tune with their incomprehensible psychology, but the rarer its pronouncements were, the more importance humans were wont to grant them.

Two of the priests had now picked up instruments of music, and the rhythm of a drum and the wail of a horn now blended with the chanting. The music ordered and modified the beat of alpha brain waves, and the rhythms of other biological processes, in all the humans present.

"Gus, help me! Help! Oh, God, no no nooo!" So screamed the female upon at last fully perceiving the stained altar just before her, and evidently realizing its purpose, just at the moment when the two priests who were not playing instruments came to tear away her garlands and clothes and chain her down upon the stones. The berserker watched steadily to see whether Gus or God (whatever entities these might be) might come to

the female's aid, although from its experience following 17,261 similar appeals the probability seemed vanishingly small.

The female was secured to the altar and no help for her arrived. Her screams continued as Andreas took up a sharp implement and removed from her living body the organs most closely connected with the reproduction of life and the nourishment of the very young. These he threw before the berserker, demonstrating a symbolic and real triumph of Death over the very wellsprings of life. The ventral surface of her torso was then opened more deeply, and the central blood-pump of her body was excised, whereupon the female almost instantly ceased to function.

It was now time for the second victim to be placed upon the altar.

"No. Listen, my friends, I'm with you. No, no, not me. How can this be happening? Wait, let's talk, you're making a mistake. I'll join you." And then a wordless, hopeless cry, as his feet were tripped out from under him and he was thrown down naked upon the stones.

Why should the male organism continue to struggle so violently when it must perceive that the chances of such struggle producing favorable results were now astronomically remote? Now at last the male had been chained down.

"I'll help you! I'll do anything you want. Oh. Ah. No. Forgive me, everyone . . ." Another scream, as his organs of generation too were removed, and cast into the bloody puddle of female parts. And now his ventral tissues parted under the sharp knife in the High Priest's

hands, and now his heart, still pulsating, was held up in offering to the god of Death.

"It is well, it is pleasing," the berserker told the five gory, happy men who now stood quietly before it. Drum and horn and voice had ceased. The chamber was still. The five who still bore the burden of life were subsiding now into states of emotional relaxation.

"I am pleased," the berserker reiterated. "Go now and prepare to bring the starship to me, that we may begin to attach my circuitry to its control systems. Only when that is done can we begin the alteration of its drive."

"Today or tomorrow, oh Death, we will bring you the starship," said Andreas. "As soon as we are sure that Lachaise can fly it safely we will lower it into the pit. Tomorrow also we will bring you fresh human sacrifice."

"That will be good." Meanwhile a possible problem had suggested itself to the berserker. "Are many of your people mystified by or curious about the ship? Is there any unrest because of its presence?"

"There is some curiosity about it, oh Death, but I will handle that. This afternoon there will be a distraction that will leave the people able to think or talk of nothing else. Thorun is going to walk forth into the city and display his powers."

The berserker tried to compute the probable results of such an event, and found it could not grapple with the numerous abstract factors successfully. "In the past you have always been cautious about putting Thorun on display."

"Lord Death, the masses will not

accept as divine any creature that they can see daily in the streets. But Thorun's future will now be short in any case. At the most, a thirtieth-of-an-old-man's-lifetime, and the masses of this world will no longer need a god—or any god save Thou."

The berserker decided to trust its goodlife servant in this matter. So far he had never failed his god. "So be it, loyal Andreas. Proceed in the service of Death as you think best."

Andreas bowed low, and then the humans began their rituals of departure, which included cleaning up the mess they had made.

The berserker computed routinely that two deaths had been achieved today, which was a good, if modest, accomplishment. But, as always the waste of time and energy involved in formal sacrifice had been considerable, and that was not good.

Never had the berserker asked for offerings of pain and terror. Killing, simple killing without end as long as life existed, was all it wanted. It was not enthusiastic about inflicting pain, which was after all a manifestation of life and therefore, after all, evil.

It allowed the torture to go on only because the infliction of pain was so satisfying to the humans who were its servitors.

XII

THE two finalists of Thorun's Tournament were still being kept waiting outside the city gate.

"Thomas, why are we being treated so? Disregarded. Forced to

wait here, like tradesmen or musicians or actors, without honor. Are we not now nearly gods? Is this just some final form of trial?"

"My foolish, highborn friend." Thomas's voice was sympathetic, the rest of his answer long in coming. "You really think that there are gods in there?"

"I—" Farley had not been able to sit down for restlessness, and now he swayed on his feet in agony of mind. "Thorun help me! I do not know." His admission of doubt hung in the air while time stretched on and on, an endless-seeming time for Farley in which, as far as he could tell, Thorun did nothing at all.

"You in there!" Farley bellowed suddenly, toward the priests who still looked down upon them from the wall. Startled eyes swung round to focus on him. The priest Yelgir had gone in some time ago, saying he would soon be back.

"What?" one answered, awkwardly.

"Are we companions of the gods or not? What kind of welcome is this you have prepared for us? Leros shall hear of this, and the High Priest himself!"

He paused then, as suddenly as if he had run into a wall, his flaring anger burned out as fast as it had arisen. "Thomas," he whispered. "Did you hear my words just now? Not 'Thorun will hear of this' but 'the High Priest will hear'. I know now what I believe." Again his look changed, to anger once more, but this time quiet and bitter. "Why then am I here?"

His loud outburst had had enough effect on the priests that

one of them was now beginning a speech placatory if not apologetic. But Farley would not hear it. Still speaking to Thomas, he demanded: "Tell me, what will happen if you and I choose not to fight? If we simply turn our backs on them, and go about our own affairs?"

Thomas was aghast and scowling, shaking his head in silent disapproval. Farley could bear no more. With deliberate scorn he turned his back on all of them and started to walk away. Thomas at once glanced toward the priests and saw their wishes in their eyes. Farley had not gone more than ten paces before Thomas came to block his way. Not for the first time, it struck Farley as marvelous that such a bulky man could move so lightly.

"Thomas, walk away with me, in peace."

The man holding the spear leveled shook his head. "That cannot be."

"Come. If you still lust for more fighting, I have no doubt that we will find it on our way. These soft men who play at being gods will send their soldiers after us and we are not likely to reach the bottom of the mountain alive. But we will die in true battle, as men should, and not for the amusement of liars. Come."

Thomas was still not angry, but very grim. "Farley, I mean to remain alive, and to prove to these men that I am the mightiest warrior in the land. If I do not conquer you, that will not be proven fully. Come. Let us fight."

The spear had been leveled for some time, and now Farley saw the

little movement at Thomas's shoulder that meant a thrust was coming. Farley drew his own weapon even as he leaped back from the spear thrust. Farley fought. There was no choice. When he struck with his sword his arm felt as strong as ever, but something was lacking now—from his backbone or from his soul.

He was not conscious of being afraid. It was only that he wanted nothing but to leave this place of fraud. His feet tried to move him toward the downhill road when they should have been driving him forward for the kill. And suddenly his belly was being torn open by the spear.

Farley knew that he was lying on his face in the soft groundcover. Not bad, his father said, reaching down a hand to help him up, but you must practice more. Oh father, I tried so hard. Then it seemed to Farley that he was walking carefree through the gods' green park, but the white walls were behind him, not in front, and he was going home.

THOMAS, when he had made sure that the last loser of the Tournament was quite dead, bent over to once more wipe his spear. He cleaned it on Farley's costly cloak; the cloth had been ruined anyhow, by the days and nights in the open, and the many battles.

When the weapon was as clean as he could get it under the circumstances Thomas attached the carrying cord to the spear again and slung it over his shoulder. The same few faces were still watching

him from the gate and the top of the wall. They showed mild approval, like idlers looking on at some casual brawl. None of them said anything.

"Well," Thomas announced, feeling somewhat irritated, "you have seen it. I am your man. Six duels against the very best in the world, and I have only one trifling scratch while they are all dead."

"Andreas will be displeased at missing the final duel," said one. Another called down to Thomas: "Be patient for a little while. The High Priest is coming soon, we expect. Come inside the gate if you wish."

Thomas decided to bring Farley into the city with him, as a trophy, a symbol of all his victories. He squatted and with a grunt picked up the warm, loose body at his feet. Farley was heavier than the appearance of his rangy frame suggested, and Thomas's steps toward the city gate were slow and weighty. The gate swung open for him after he had stood before it for a moment in fast-mounting impatience.

His first view of the city inside was a disappointment. The gate gave directly onto a small paved square, only about twenty meters on a side. The square was completely boxed in by buildings and walls that were but little lower than the outer city wall through which he had just passed. There were several gates in the inner walls, but all were closed, or showed nothing but more walls beyond, so there was not much of interest to be seen in any direction. A few more people, of high and low degree, were looking down at Thomas from walls and

windows. Seeing no place in particular to go, Thomas bent and with some care set his slow-dripping burden down.

A small fountain gurgled nearby and he went to get a drink of water, seeing that no one was rushing to offer him fermented milk or wine. The people on the walls had ceased to stare at him now, and were gone about their business. Others appeared from time to time to glance and turn away. Here and there slaves went about their errands. A train of pack animals entered the city through the outer gate which had remained open, and came brushing past Thomas at close quarters.

The man on the wall who had invited him in had gone. Thomas looked about, but there was no one for him to berate for his shabby treatment. Was he expected to go prowling the city at random, grabbing strangers by the arm and asking directions? Where is Thorun's great hall? He is expecting me.

They had said the High Priest was coming. Seating himself on the edge of the fountain, Thomas retired into dignity, and remained there quietly as the shadows shifted across the square with the slow progress of the sun. Once there intruded upon his thoughts a soft snuffling, lapping sound. A small hungry domestic animal had discovered Farley's otherwise forgotten corpse. Thomas moved fast, took two strides and launched the beast halfway across the square with a rib-cracking kick. Then he returned to the fountain and sat passively waiting.

When at last he heard someone approaching him and looked up ready to speak his anger, he found that it was only Leros, with whom he had no quarrel. Leros looked sick, or at least noticeably older than he had a few days ago.

Standing before him with hands outspread, Leros said: "I am sorry, Thomas, Lord Thomas. They say Andreas is coming now, but I do not know what welcome he plans to give you. If I were High Priest things would be different. Let me congratulate you on your victory."

Thomas got up to his full height. "Where is the High Priest Andreas?" he called out, looking around at the anonymous faces on walls and in windows. Suddenly their number was growing again, more people peering out into the square at every moment. Something impended. Spectators were gathering. "Where is he, I am growing impatient with this treatment."

"Speak more respectfully," a tall, regal-looking man admonished him sharply from his place of security on a high inner wall.

Thomas looked this one over and decided to continue to be bold; it was an attitude that usually got results, for him. "Respectfully? I am a god now, am I not? Or a demigod at least. And you do not look like anything more than a man."

"The point is well taken," said Leros sternly to the man on the wall. That one looked angry, but before he could say anything a murmur swept around the square and everyone's attention again shifted. The smallest and most intricately decorated of the inner gates that gave on the square was being

opened from the far side by a young priest. Footsteps crunched on the neat gravel walk revealed beyond this gate, and there emerged from it a tall, skull-faced man dressed more in purple than in white. From the reactions of those around him, Thomas realized that this must be Andreas.

"You must be Thomas the Grabber," the High Priest said, nodding to him affably, speaking in the confident voice of one who is habitually in charge of things. "I see you have finished the Tournament somewhat ahead of schedule. I am sorry to have missed it all—the final round especially. But no matter, Thorun is pleased." Andreas nodded, smiling his smile. "So pleased is he that he has decided to grant you special honor, even beyond that promised you below."

This was more like it. Thomas made a little bow toward the High Priest, then stood taller than before.

The smile was a baring of teeth in the skull mouth. "You are to fight the fight that all true warriors must dream about. I hope that you are ready. But of course, as a true warrior, you must be."

"I am ready," Thomas growled, meanwhile cursing himself mentally for being fooled by the first soft words. "But I am done with fighting, as far as Thorun's Tournament is concerned. I am the winner." All around him he heard a catching of breaths. Evidently one did not talk like that to the master of the world, the High Priest of Thorun. But Thomas would not simply bow his head and be only another man, not now. He must take and hold the

place that he had rightfully earned.

Andreas, glaring at him, put steel into his voice. "You are to fight against Thorun himself. Do you mean that you would prefer to enter his hall with your blood still safe inside your veins, with all your joints still hung together? I cannot believe it."

The murmuring voices rose up wildly now, in rumor and speculation. What did the High Priest mean? Could Thorun actually be coming, to duel against a mortal man?

It made no sense to Thomas, and he did not like it in the least. Still, looking at the clever and experienced Andreas, very much in control, he decided that boldness had its limits. He bowed once more to the High Priest, and said: "Sir, a word with you alone, if I may."

"No more words, for you or from you," said Andreas softly. He turned his head slightly in a listening gesture, and smiled again.

Beyond the gateway through which Andreas had come the gravel crunched again, in the rhythm of a single long-striding pair of feet. Incredibly heavy the tread must be, to make the gravel sound like that. Above the low wall in that direction the top of a head came into view, a mat of wild dark hair, while the feet must be moving at ground level three meters lower. No man was that tall. With an unfamiliar weakness in his knees Thomas believed for a moment that his own cynicism had undone him after all. The naive pious ones had been right all along. The dead of the Tournament, dismembered and buried and burnt along the way, would

shortly walk before him, laughing as they followed—

The figure now appearing in the gateway before Thomas, bending to pass through.

Thorun.

XIII

His head of wild dark hair was bound up by a golden band. His fur cloak, vast as it was, barely covered his mountainous shoulders. His marvelous sword, nearly as long as Thomas's spear, was girdled to his waist. All as the legends had it. His face, though . . .

Thorun did not seem to be looking at anything. He stared over Andreas's head, and over Thomas's, and through the still-open outer gate (where the limping maul-slave stood and gaped as if he thought those eyes were fixed on him) and brooded with his terrible unblinking eyes upon the world outside. Once he had come to a halt Thorun did not move, did not shift his position or stir a finger, any more than would a statue.

Andreas said nothing more, or, if he did so, Thomas did not hear. Rather the High Priest bowed himself out of the way, silently and obsequiously, though with some amusement still visible, out of the way of the mighty figure of the god.

The eyes had moved now, though the head had not, and Thorun was looking at Thomas. The eyes had literally some kind of glow inside them, like those of an animal seen at nighttime by reflected light. This glow was red and orange. Glancing quickly around, Thomas saw that

the eyes were on him alone, for no one any longer stood near him. Against one wall of the square he saw Leros prostrate in deep reverence, as were a number of others on walls and ground.

Scores of men were watching now, men in white robes and gray rags. Those who had been in the middle of the square were scrambling away, reaching for high perches, getting themselves atop things and behind things, getting out of the way. Awe was in every face. Almost. Only Farley would not interrupt his contemplation of the sky.

Thorun now came stepping forward. Though his movements were limber and seemed natural enough, even graceful, for some reason the impression of watching a statue persisted. Perhaps it was the face, which was utterly inhuman, though the form of each individual feature was correct. Neither was the face godlike—unless gods were less than men, unless they were not, in fact, alive.

But Thorun's strides were very long and purposeful. Thomas, seeing the long sword coming endlessly out of its scabbard as the god approached, got himself into motion just in time. The man launched himself backward out of the arc of the sword, and it made a soft and mournful sighing as it passed in a stroke that would have cut a man in half as readily as a weed. The war god's bearded lips opened at last and bellowed forth a deafening battle-cry. It was a strange and terrible sound, as inhuman as the glowing, unblinking eyes and the dead face.

Getting his spear unlimbered just in time, Thomas mechanically held it out to parry Thorun's next stroke. When the god's sword struck he felt a numbing jolt up both his arms, and his armored spear was nearly torn out of his grasp. It was like some nightmare of being a child again, and facing a grown warrior in combat. The watchers cheered. Whoever or whatever Thorun was, his strength was well beyond that of any man.

Thorun advanced methodically, unhurriedly. Backing and circling, Thomas knew that he must now plan and fight the finest battle of his life.

THOMAS began to fight his finest battle but before long was forced to realize that it was hopeless. His own most violent attacks were knocked aside with effortless ease, while Thorun's sword strokes came with such murderous power and precision that he knew he could not parry or avoid them for long. Already the battering of sword on spear had made his arms grow numb and weary. He was gripping his spear in both hands like a quarterstaff and retreating steadily, meanwhile trying to discover some workable strategy, to spy out some weakness in the defense of his monstrous opponent. Whether that opponent was god or man or something else entirely was a question that did not bother Thomas in the least just now.

At last, with a good deceptive move followed by a superb thrust, Thomas got his spear-point home

into Thorun's tunic of heavy fur, only to feel it rebound from some hard layer of armor underneath. A moment of sudden hope burned out as quickly as it had come. Around him the watchers gasped in astonishment at his seeming success, then relaxed with a collective sigh as the world, that had tilted for a moment, settled back. Thorun was unconquerable.

Thomas, however, retained a spark of hope. If he could hit home once with the spear, then he might be able to hit home again. If the fur-clad chest and belly were invulnerable, where should he try to strike?

How about the face? No. He could stand a little farther off—and it would be less nearly suicidal—if he tried instead for the legs. Thomas observed that the joints of Thorun's exposed and seemingly unarmored knees were not covered with unbroken skin like that on human legs, but instead showed fine and smoothly shifting cracks, as if they were the legs of a well-made puppet. The opening in the knee-joint presented a very small and moving target, but no more difficult a one than the insects on the wing Thomas had sometimes hit in practice.

No better plan having suggested itself, Thomas feinted high, low, high again, and then put all his power and skill into a low thrust. His eyes and arms did not fail him. The sharp point of the spear found the small opening just as it was narrowing slightly with the straightening of Thorun's leg.

There came a grinding vibration down the spear's shaft, and an

audible snap of metal. Thorun lurched but did not fall. With the suddenness of the slamming of a door, a silence fell over the arena. The tip of Thomas's spearhead came away bright, where its point had been broken off.

The silence that had fallen when Thorun nearly lost his footing still held; Thorun's knee was now frozen in a half-bent position. The ruler of the world was wounded, and nothing could be heard but the scraping dragging of his crippled foot as he continued to advance. He advanced more slowly than before but as implacably as ever. Thomas, in retreat again, glimpsed Andreas standing atop a wall. The High Priest's face was dark as a thundercloud, and one of his hands was half extended like a claw, as if he wanted to interfere now but did not dare.

The limping god came in range again of his human opponent. Once more Thorun's great sword became a gleaming blur of speed, hammering on with untiring violence, driving Thomas back and back, around and around the little space. Thomas, meaning to strike again at the wounded knee, fainted high and low and high again, and then was nearly killed, was knocked off his feet, by the impact of the sword against his spear. Thorun was not to be fooled twice by the same tactic.

Thomas rolled over desperately. Thorun, lurching with grotesque speed, was almost upon him. Thomas got his feet under him and got away barely in time. Leap in and grab, Thomas? Never, against this foe. As well leap in and wrestle an

ice-born glacier-beast—or one of the glaciers themselves.

Somehow Thomas had managed to retain his spear, and he was still blocking the sword with its steel-armored shaft, but he could no longer gather energy to launch a thrust. Still the sword drove him back and back, and around and around. Now the watching white-robots had once more found their voices.

The end could not be held off any longer, Thomas thought. Weary and off balance, he raised his arms in desperation to catch yet another sword-sweep against his indestructible spear. Again the impact knocked him from his feet. The world seemed to turn slowly, slowly around him as he spun in the air and fell, giving him time to wonder whether there was a real Thorun to be confronted after he had been slain by this limping imposter.

Thomas came down hard and for a moment could not move. He had lost his grip on his spear at last. The weapon lay only a hands-breadth from his fingers in the dust of the square, but grasping it again was one of the hardest greatest achievements of Thomas's life.

THE killing machine paused in its limping progress, as if uncertain whether the fight was already won. Then with its crablike motion it came forward once again. Thomas got himself up on one knee, his spear leveled. Another sudden cessation of noise made him aware of how the watchers had been yelling for his death. Thorun's glowing but lifeless eyes were judging him.

What was the wargod waiting for? Thomas struggled back to his feet, knowing that the next swordstroke, or the one after that, would surely be the last. Then with the edge of his vision he saw a gray-clad figure approaching him from one side. It moved with a limp, as if in sacriligious mockery of wounded Thorun's gait. The slave's leaden maul was lifting casually to dash out Thomas's brains.

Thomas had been ready to meet death, but by all the gods, this was too much! He was not yet down and helpless! He turned, meaning to spear the slave through, while Thorun, lackwit, continued to hesitate.

Muscles ready for a killing lunge, Thomas for the first time looked closely into the slave's face, and was momentarily paralyzed by what he saw. And gray-clad Giles the Treacherous stepped sideways with smooth unlimping speed, and with all his warrior's strength let fly with the massive maul against Thorun's already damaged knee.

Metal cracked. The bright arc of Thorun's next swordstroke, already underway, went tilting awkwardly and curved well wide of Giles and Thomas both. Metallic snapping sounds prolonged themselves. Slowly, but without dignity, the monster sat down, its left knee bent at a wrong angle. It came to rest in a sitting position with its torso bolt upright, staring at its enemies with a face that had not changed, but had suddenly become absurd.

"Thomas!" cried Giles. He leaped back just in time from the next stroke that Thorun, still sitting, aimed at him. "Get him between us, Thomas. Finish him!"

For the first time uttering a war-cry of his own, a hoarse and wordless yell, Thomas moved quickly to accomplish the encirclement. His peripheral vision told him that no one in the watching throng was moving to interfere. They were in pandemonium, their white robes swirling with disordered motion and their voices straining in excited noise. There was Leros, standing with arms folded in apparent calm, barely out of the way of the fight and watching it in utter concentration. Thomas glimpsed Andreas standing on a wall. The High Priest was waving his arms and seemed to be shouting orders, but the insane excitement was now such that no man's voice could be heard.

Even crippled as he was Thorun came near to being a match for his opposition. Neither spear nor maul could beat down the huge sword in his untiring arm, and he turned his seated body with marvelous speed to face first one foreman and then the other.

Catching the eye of Giles, Thomas roared: "Together! Now!" and they rushed at Thorun from opposite sides simultaneously. The sword came at Thomas, and he managed to parry it yet again only because Thorun, in his sitting position, could not get his whole body behind a swing. Even so Thomas thought for a moment that his own forearm had been broken in the clash. But meanwhile Giles had got in close, swinging like a piledriver, and landed his maul full force on the back of Thorun's neck.

The blow would have exploded the head of any mortal man. Thorun's wild hair flew, his great head

jerked, his torso swayed a little, his swordarm hesitated. Now Thomas's blunted spearpoint smashed into his right eye, which went out like a candle, with a tiny crunch that came through the spear like breaking glass. Now the maul came down again, this time on the swordhand. Thorun did not drop his sword, but now it stood out at a different angle from his fist.

The giant died slowly, piecemeal, indifferent rather than brave, emitting neither cries nor blood. There was only a step-by-step loss of function under the terrible punishment of spear and hammer, a progressive revelation of Thorun's vincibility, a bit-by-bit reduction of his body to little more than shattered metal and glass and fur.

Even when the huge body was hopelessly beaten, when the god's battered face had been humiliatingly pounded down into the earth beside the fountain, the sword arm was still trying to fight, lashing out with murderous, random blows. A spear thrust loosened its fingers and the giant sword fell from the hand with a dull little sound. The arm, its broken digits clutching spasmodically on emptiness, was still waving when Thomas and Giles looked at each other, rested their weapons, and then turned together to salute the watchers who ringed them in.

The noise of the crowd died away into an exhausted silence, a silence that seemed to Thomas to go on for a very long time. Andreas was no longer to be seen, he noted, and a few others had also vanished. Most were still watching, as if hypnotized, the helpless, stubborn move-

ments of Thorun's arm. Thomas went to kick the huge sword out of its reach.

Eyes began now to turn toward Leros, who was the senior priest still in attendance. Obviously in the grip of powerful emotions, he took two steps forward and stretched forth an arm toward the fallen giant; but Leros was still too overcome to speak, and the first of his outstretched arm clenched tightly his arm dropped back to his side.

IT WAS left to Giles to break the silence at last. Gesturing at the wrecked giant, he shouted out: "This creature is not your beloved Thorun. It cannot be! Andreas and his Inner Circle have deceived you all!"

The roar that went up from the crowd in response had much of agreement in it. But one voice cried out at Giles: "Who are you, that have interfered and done this? Agent of the Brotherhood! Spy!"

Giles raised a hand and got silence in which to make his answer. "Very well, say I am a spy, an agent, anything you like. But what I have shown you here is nothing but the truth. Call me what you will. But will you call me a god, to defeat another god in combat? And what god could I be, to conquer Thorun?" He raised his face to the bright sky, and made a holy sign. "Great Thorun, avenge yourself upon the blasphemers who have put forth this deception!" And he gestured again to where ruined Thorun still moved one arm in a parody of battle.

Several men with their daggers

drawn—there were no larger weapons in evidence among the crowd—came to surround Giles. They took away his maul and stood guard over him, but at a word from Leros did no more. Giles made no protest or resistance, but stood proudly with his arms folded. Leros, after gazing a little while longer in continued shock at what remained of Thorun, summoned two or three other leaders who were present to withdraw with him to a corner of the square. There they at once plunged into earnest talk. Most of the other spectators, marveling and arguing, began to crowd around the fallen figure that had been their god.

Giles the Treacherous, looking at Thomas, suddenly flashed him a smile of surprising brightness for a man in his doubtful situation. "Lord Thomas," Giles hailed him, "it seems that you are now the champion of gods as well as men."

"Well. You don't claim a share of the prize, whatever it may prove to be?" Thomas moved closer to Giles, with whom he felt a kinship.

"I? Never. You have won the championship fairly and I have no claim to make."

Thomas nodded, satisfied on this point. But he had other worries. Standing next to Giles, he looked around him restlessly. He had the feeling that as champion of the Tournament, and acknowledged victor over the imitation Thorun, he should be doing something, asserting authority somehow. Probably he should go to join the talk around Leros and make the priests listen to him. But what would he tell them? He realized now that he

had not the faintest idea of what was really going on. He was more likely to find out, he thought, if he stayed with Giles, who might well need some help in return soon and be willing to bargain. Anyway, Thomas felt much more at home talking with another fighting man than he did with the priests.

"Why are you here, and how?" he asked the shorter man. "It is in my memory that I saw you die."

Giles's smile had faded to a mere twist of the lip. "You saw Jud thrust at me, and me go plunging down a hillside."

"You were not even wounded?"

"I was not. You see, I had persuaded Jud that all I wanted was a chance to get out of the Tournament and away. He was something of a cynic, and so believed me. Also he was glad of the chance to take an uncontested victory, and went along with the plan I had hatched. He had only to hold back his thrusts a little, as I did.

"His sword only took a few threads from my jacket before I went over the edge. I had marked beforehand that the slave carrying the maul was of my size and coloring, which suggested the whole plan to me. When the slave came down to make sure I was dead I was waiting in the bushes and did the office for him instead. I took his rags and his rope belt and his maul, and put them on together with his limp, before dragging him uphill to be buried in my good clothes. The rest of you had started on ahead by then, as I had expected.

"I was seldom in your camp after that. My companion slave was dumb, and so lackwit he did not

notice the transformation—or perhaps he was shrewd enough to ignore intrigue when he became aware of it. None of the rest of you ever looked at me with open eyes, once I had put on gray rags—not until you looked at me just now, when you thought I was coming for you with the maul."

Thomas shook his head in wonderment. "A fearful risk you took."

"Not so great a risk as having to face you, or Kelsumba perhaps, or Farley, in open combat. I had made up my mind that *that* risk was too high."

"But still, a strange game," Thomas commented. "Why did you play it? Why—?" He gestured toward the wreckage that had been Thorun.

"I wanted to expose that thing for what it was. Rather, for what it is, since we have so far destroyed only a small part of it." Giles looked around him. His audience, that had been only Thomas and a couple of dagger-guards when he started speaking, was now far larger. He raised his voice and went on: "We all know now that this thing was never Thorun. It was only a creation of something else. Something else whose harboring on Hunters' planet would bring scorn and derision from the whole out-world if it were known to them."

"What is this shameful thing you speak of?" The question came from Leros, who had ended his conference with the other ranking priests and had now been listening to Giles for some little time.

"I am speaking of one of our ancestors' ancient enemies, a berserker," said Giles, and briefly out-

lined his conversation with Suomi in the woods. "If Andreas has not yet silenced the outworlders he is holding in the Temple, they will be able to confirm that he has stolen their ship from them. Perhaps they will be able to tell us why."

"Why should we believe the outworlders over the High Priest?" someone called, challenging.

Giles raised his voice again. "The outworlders did not bring this imitation Thorun with them. Andreas and his Inner Circle priests have used it for years, to dupe Thorun's faithful followers. No artisan on Hunters' could have made it alone, any more than he could build a spaceship. Nor can it be the true persona of a god, or not even Thomas the Grabber could have knocked it down. What else can it be then, but a berserker, or part of one? If it is not a berserker, perhaps the High Priest and his Inner Circle can explain just what it is. I would ask them now if they were here. But they fled when they saw that their fancy machine was doomed."

Leros nodded grimly. "It is time, and past time, for us to ask Andreas some hard questions." The roar of agreement that went up was short, for men wanted to hear what Leros was going to say next. He went on: "I think, though, that it is not for you to tell us what to ask. Whose agent are you, treacherous one?"

GILES shrugged, and admitted readily: "I was sent here by what you call the Brotherhood. But what of that, honest Leros? Today I

have told you and shown you nothing but demonstrable truth. I see now that we of the Brotherhood really have no quarrel with the people of Godsmountain, but only with the Inner Circle and its head."

Leros grunted, perhaps a bit bewildered by the ready flow of words, half convinced by them and half put off by their smoothness. Before he had to reply, however, he was distracted by the return of a man who had evidently been dispatched to see what was going on at the Temple. This messenger brought back word that the doors and gates leading to the Temple complex had been locked and barred from within, and the palace guard of soldiers directly under the command of the High Priest were occupying the place. Andreas would not appear, but only sent out word that all spies, traitors, and their dupes would soon tremble before his wrath.

"He will not answer reasonable questions?" Leros demanded. "He will not explain why he dared to foist this . . . this *thing* . . . upon us as a god?"

"No, Lord Leros, he will not."

"Then it is certain," Leros shouted, "Andreas no longer speaks in Thorun's name! Great Thorun, stand with us now! Stand with us as we prepare to prove in combat who can serve you best!"

There was a new outbreak of shouts and prayers, a general uproar of activity as men rushed to arm themselves, debated hasty plans of organization, and argued over whether any of the military commanders known to be nearly in the field should be summoned with

their troops and asked or ordered to drive Andreas from the Temple. This last suggestion was shouted down. Thomas gathered that the soldiers now in the Temple were too small a force to hold it for long against the aroused citizenry. Well, let the strategists debate; he would know what to do when it came to fighting.

Finding himself for the moment more or less alone again with Giles, Thomas said to him: "I thank you for stepping in against the monster; I will not forget it." Thomas was beginning to appreciate how shrewd Giles was, and to understand that he himself was going to need shrewd advice to secure a position of power among these people.

"You are welcome, Lord Thomas, for whatever my help was worth."

"Why did the Brotherhood send you here?"

Giles made a little self-deprecating motion with his head. "I was the best fighter they could find. I was sent to the Tournament from a district largely under their control. They hoped of course that I could win the Tournament, and then function against Godsmountain from some place of authority inside it. But long before the Tournament was over I realized that I was not going to win. You and some of the other fighters were obviously better than I. So I hatched the scheme using Jud Isaksson . . . but tell me, Lord Thomas, why are you here?"

"I?" Thomas was surprised.

"Yes. I don't think you ever believed there was a real Thorun here, to reward you with immortality. I

have told you my real reason for taking part in the Tournament; what was yours?"

"Huh. Well, fighting is my business. It was dangerous, yes, as any real fighting is, but I expected to win. I have never met the man who could stand against me in single combat."

Giles was quietly fascinated. "Did you never stop to think that each of us could truthfully have made that identical claim? Each of the original sixty-four?"

Thomas blinked. "No," he said slowly. "No, I did not stop to think of that." Suddenly he remembered the utter astonishment on the beardless dying face of young Bram. Was that in the second round or the third? He could not remember, but it seemed very long ago.

He raised a hand over his shoulder to caress the heavy spear slung on his back. He would have to get a new one made. Not only was the point of this one broken but the shaft was dented and weakened, its steel reinforcing strips twisted and loosened by the battering of Thorun's sword. "I wanted a place of power, wanted to be one of the men who rule the world from this mountaintop."

Giles prompted: "You thought they held the Tournament because they wanted the best fighter in the world up here, to be Godsmountain's champion. And as such you would have great power and wealth."

"Yes. That's about it."

"An intelligent guess, I would say. I, too, believed the Tournament had some such purpose,

though there were some points I could not understand . . . anyway, it seems that we were wrong. Andreas and his Inner Circle deceived everyone in one way or another. The simple warriors with a simple story of gods, and us by letting us think that we were wise and understood the truth."

Thomas swore a great oath, throwing in all the gods he could remember on short notice. "Then why *did* they have the Tournament? Andreas and his gang did not watch us to applaud our skill or dwell upon our sufferings. Nobody was allowed to watch, except for a few priests and the outworlders. Why, why preach and urge us on to slaughter one another?"

"They wanted senseless slaughter," said Giles, "because they really do not worship Thorun, who has life and honor in him, and a purpose besides destruction. They could never get the mass of people to worship their true god, who is nothing but Death. Thorun enjoys women and wine, tall tales and food. Especially he honors the courage that makes all other virtues possible. But death is what *they* worship, and death is what berserkers represent, death without honor or purpose, death alone." Giles fell silent, squinting at the wreckage of Thorun on the ground where it lay face down in the mud near the fountain, not far from Farley's sky-gazing corpse. Then Giles added: "No, that is not good enough. You are right, why did Andreas and the others not watch the Tournament, enjoy the killing—or let others watch it. Only the outworlders were allowed to come . . .

and while they watched, their ship was stolen. Is that it? The finest heroes of our planet fought and died only to lure them here."

A shout was being raised by many voices, not only in the square but all around the city. The outworlders' ship was in the air.

XIV

THE liftoff when it came was very smooth, and took Suomi completely by surprise; he had dozed off at his desk, his head resting on his arms, and on first waking had had the hideous feeling that the ship was already settling down, its flight completed, and that his only chance to act had come and gone.

Hastily he turned to look at the monitor screen on the bulkhead beside the stateroom's intercom control and saw with relief that the flight was certainly not over. Imaged in the screen now was *Orion's* control room. The high-ranking priest called Lachaise was seated in the central pilot's chair, bent forward over controls and instruments in an attitude of rigid concentration. Around Lachaise other priests and soldiers sat or stood in nervous postures, clinging to whatever solid supports they could get hold of. Looking past the far side of the control room, Suomi could see down the passageway to the entrance lock, at the far side of which the main exterior hatch was still standing open; moving the ship in such a configuration was perfectly feasible, provided of course that no high speed or high altitude was attained. Another soldier clung just

inside the entrance lock, looking out and down through the open outer doors. Presumably he was posted there as insurance should the screens in the control room somehow fail, or (what was much more likely) should the novice pilot have trouble in interpreting their images.

The flight was evidently going to be a short one. The berserker must be somewhere nearby, and its loyal human servants were going to bring the captured starship to it. Then they would be able to get to work in earnest on the ship. Directing an operation on itself, the berserker could be wired into the onboard computers, assimilate them into its brain, and take over the ship's various systems as extensions of its own being. And then the drive . . . its conversion to a death machine could be performed at Godsmountain if convenient, or the berserker could fly itself and a loyal coterie to some safe spot in the uninhabited north and there prepare to kill the world.

Through his stateroom screen Suomi could monitor much of what was showing on the big screens in the control room. He had not dozed long, for it was still bright day outside. He watched, on the screens, the wooded slopes of Godsmountain falling away very gently, then tilting a bit. At the same time Suomi felt *Orion* tilt in the hands of her inexperienced pilot as he started her moving sideways toward the summit. They would not be bothering with the artificial gravity on this low, slow flight in atmosphere.

The voices of the people in the control room, and those who were

communicating with them from outside the ship, were audible in Suomi's stateroom, coming in over intercom. "Schoenberg," Lachaise was saying tensely now, "I have a yellow light showing on the life-systems panel. Can you explain it?"

"Let me see," said Schoenberg's voice, wearily, speaking offstage from Suomi's viewpoint. After a little pause, presumably while a screen was switched to give him a better view, Schoenberg continued: "That's nothing to worry about. Just a reminder that the main hatch is open and the safety interlocks have been disconnected to let you fly her that way. It's just a reminder so you don't forget and go shooting up into space." Whatever pressure had been brought to bear, Schoenberg was evidently cooperating fairly thoroughly.

The ship was directly over the city now, drifting balloon-like on silent engines only a few meters above the tallest rooftops. "Go higher, Lachaise!" another man's voice barked, authoritatively, and Suomi saw the high-ranking priest in white and purple swivel nervously in the pilot's chair, his pale hands in jerky motion, over-correcting. The ship lurched upward while the men around Lachaise clung to their chairs and stanchions and eyed him apprehensively. The upward acceleration ceased, the ship hung for a heart-stopping moment in free fall, and then with a few more up-and-down oscillations was brought back under more or less steady control.

"I should have been allowed more time to practice!" the pilot protested feverishly.

"There is no time," the authoritative voice snapped back. Suomi recognized it now as that of Andreas, speaking from outside the ship. "Thorup failed and Leros and some agent of the Brotherhood have inflamed the mob. We will load our dear lord and master onto the ship and take him to safety in the north with our prisoners. All will yet be well, Lachaise, if you can only maneuver carefully. Come over the Temple now."

Lachaise was now guiding himself by a screen that showed what was directly below the ship. Suomi, in effect looking over Lachaise's shoulder, saw a strange sight the significance of which he could not grasp at first. Near the largest building in the center of the city—this must be the Temple, for the ship was now hovering almost directly above it—another much lower structure was having its roof peeled back, dismantled, from inside. The workmen doing the job were partly visible, their hands and arms coming and going, removing pieces of roof from the edge of the rapidly enlarging opening. Inside there was the tracery of thin scaffolding on which the workmen evidently stood, and besides that nothing but darkness, unconquerable by the sun that everywhere else fell bright on street and wall. It took Suomi a few moments to realize that the building's interior looked dark because it was a single vast pit, dug far below the level of the city's streets.

"Tell them to hurry with the roof," Lachaise pleaded.

"Are you in position yet?" the voice of Andreas countered, the

strain in it now quite audible. "I do not think you are quite in the proper position."

SUOMI could see now that small but tumultuous groups of white-robed men were running about in the streets around the Temple complex, deploying as if to encircle it. Here and there a drawn sword waved. And uniformed soldiers moved about on the Temple's walls. Now Suomi saw the bright streak of an arrow flying from street to wall and two more darting in the opposite direction in reply. Perhaps the man in gray, with his grandiose scheme of entering the city disguised as a slave and touching off a rebellion, had been more successful than Suomi had thought possible.

As for Suomi himself, he had done all he could at the workbench and now it was time to prepare for combat. Feeling unreal, he picked up the small battery-powered unit he had assembled and went quickly across the small room and got into his bunk. Reaching up an arm, he turned his intercom to SPEAK. The voices of the others still came in; and, though they still could not see him, he could join in their conversation now. But he was not ready.

The bunk was capable of being converted into an acceleration couch, meant to be used in case of failure of artificial gravity somewhere in deep space. To fully convert the bunk now would not be feasible, but Suomi swung the center section of restraining pads over himself as he lay down, and

locked it into place. He lay there holding his little recorder ready to play, the gain turned to maximum. He lay rigid with tension and fear, almost unable to breathe, not yet knowing for certain whether he would be brave enough to do what must be done. That it might kill him was not so bad. That it might accomplish nothing except to earn him a leisurely and hideous punishment from a victorious Andreas—that was very possible, and a chance just about too hideous to take.

Suomi, by turning his head, could still observe his stateroom screen. Lachaise was edging the ship over the great pit now, unmistakably meaning to lower it inside. The removal of the roof out to the eaves had been completed. The fragile scaffolding left inside would part like spiderweb beneath *Orion's* armored weight. It was all very well planned and organized. Andreas and the others must have been preparing for a long time to capture a starship. Who had told them how to plan their pit, how big it must be to hold the kind of ship men would be likely to use on a surreptitious hunting expedition? Of course, their lord and beloved master, Death . . . Death knew all the sizes and shapes of human starships, he had fought against them for a thousand years.

Lachaise in his pilot's chair was now carrying on a continuous exchange of tense comments with the men waiting and guiding him below, and with the lookout at the open hatch. The ship began to lower. Down, and down—but this proved to be a false start, and La-

chaise had to straighten her out and bring her up again, dribbling a thin trail of white dust from where the hard hull had brushed delicately against a high Temple cornice and knocked down a barrowful or two of masonry.

Up they went, and sideways an almost imperceptible distance, and started down again. Lachaise was probably a natural technician and machine operator; at any rate he was learning very fast. This time the slow descent was true.

His finger on the switch that would turn on the recorder, Suomi balanced over infinite depths of personal change, chasms of sudden death or slow defeat and somewhere a small plateau of triumph. With a part of his mind he wondered if this was the sensation that Schoenberg and other hunters sought, and the men who faced one another in the Tournament, when a lifetime's awareness of being seemed to pulse through every second of experience.

He could accept all the possibilities. He could do what must be done. The ship was going down into the hole. Timing, now, tactics. At the bottom they might very well cut off the drive, so that would be too long to wait. Right now, just entering the top of the hole, they were still more outside than in, right now would be too soon.

He waited through an eternity; the ship must now be a quarter of the way down.

Halfway down. Eternity was passing.

Now. With a relief almost unbearable with surcease of mental strain, Suomi touched the switch

on the small box he was holding.

THE voice of Johann Karlsen, biting and unforgettable, heavily amplified, boomed out through *Orion's* intercom system, through the radio links from the control room to the outside, through the open main hatch, reverberating at a volume that must have carried into all the nearby city: "THIS IS THE HIGH COMMANDER SPEAKING. LANDING PARTIES READY. UNCOVER THE BERSERKER . . ."

There was more, but it was drowned out by another voice, a voice that could only be the berserker's own, booming and bellowing from some hidden place: "FULL DRIVE. ANDREAS, IN THE NAME OF GLORIOUS DEATH, FULL DRIVE AT ONCE KILL JOHANN KARLSEN, HE IS PROBABLY ABOARD. I COMMAND YOU, LACHAISE, FULL DRIVE AT ONCE. KILL JOHANN KARLSEN, KIL—"

And then that voice too was buried, drowned out, obliterated by the explosive violence resulting from the full-power application of a starship's drive, not only deep within a planet's gravitational well but almost literally buried within Godsmountain's mass. Suomi, heavily protected by his padded bunk and bracing himself as well as he was able, was still shaken as if by the jaws of a glacier-beast, flattened against the bulkhead next to his bunk, then forced away from it again, only saved by his straps from being smeared against the stateroom's opposite bulkhead. The room's regular lights went out, and

simultaneously an emergency light glared into life above the door.

There followed a sudden cessation of acceleration, a silence and a falling that went on and on. Then the fall ended with another bone-jarring crash, loud and violent but still far closer to the humanly endurable on the scale of physical events than was that first detonation drive.

The ship seemed to bounce, crashed again, teetered and rocked, and came at last to a shuddering rest, her decks tilted at somewhere near forty degrees from the horizontal. Now all was quiet. The screen in Suomi's stateroom was effectively dead, its surface only flickering here and there with electronic noise.

Suomi unstrapped himself from his bunk and climbed the crazy slope of the deck to reach the door. He had failed to pick up loose objects before entering combat and breakage in the stateroom had been heavy, though there were no indications of basic structural damage. The strength of the hull had probably saved the ship from that.

The stateroom door opened forcefully when he unlatched it, and the dead or unconscious body of a soldier slid in, trailing broken-looking legs. Suomi stuck his head out into the passage and looked and listened. All was quiet and nothing moved in the glare of the emergency lights. Here too deck and bulkheads and overhead were still in place.

He turned back to the fallen sentry and decided that the man was probably dead. Guilt or triumph might come later, he supposed.

Right now Suomi only considered whether to arm himself with the man's sword, which was still resting peacefully in its scabbard. In the end Suomi left it there. A sword in his hand was not going to do any good for anybody, least of all himself.

He thumped on the door of Barbara Hurtado's stateroom and when a weak voice answered he opened the door and climbed in. Amid a kaleidoscopic jumble of multicolored clothes from a spilled closet she sat in a heap on the floor, wearing an incongruous fluffy robe, her brown hair in wild disarray, leaning against a chair that must be fastened to the deck.

"I think my collarbone is broken," she said faintly. "Maybe it isn't, though. I can move my arm."

"I'm the one who did it," he said. "Sorry. There was no way I could give you any warning."

"You?" She raised her eyebrows. "All right. Did you do as much damage to those sons of beasts out there?"

"More, I hope. That was the idea. Shall we go out and see? Can you walk?"

"Love to go and see their broken bodies, but I don't think I can. They've got me chained to my bunk, which I guess is why I wasn't killed. The things they were making me do. Always wondered what soldiers were like and I finally found out."

"I'm going out to look around."

"Don't leave me, Carlos."

"I'll be back as soon as I can."

Things in the control room were very bad, or very good, depending

on your point of view. It was closer to the drive than the staterooms were, Suomi supposed. Lachaise, strapped into the central, padded chair, was leaning back with eyes open and arms outflung, showing no wounds but very plainly dead all the same. Intense localized neutron flux at the moment when the drive's fields collapsed was one possibility in such disasters, Suomi remembered reading somewhere. Lachaise had perished happily, no doubt, in blind obedience to his god, perhaps believing or hoping that he really was killing Johann Karlsen. In the name of glorious death . . . yes.

Around Lachaise, the priests and soldiers who had been helping and watching him had not been strapped into padded chairs. Neutrons or not, they now looked like so many bad losers in the Tournament. This many lives at least had the berserker harvested today. Some of them still breathed, but none were at all dangerous any more.

The main hatch was still open, Suomi discovered, looking down at it from the control room, but it was completely choked with broken white masonry and massive splintered timbers; part of the Temple or of somebody's house perhaps. The ship had come to rest within the city, then. Probably a number of people had been killed outside the ship as well as in it, but Godsmountain had not been leveled, a lot of its people were doubtless still alive, and whoever was left in charge should come digging his way into the ship eventually, probably wanting to take vengeance for the destruction.

With some difficulty Suomi made his way back to Barbara's stateroom and managed to lodge himself in a sitting position by her side. "Exit's blocked. Looks like we wait together." He described the carnage briefly.

"Be a good boy, Carlos, get me a pain pill from my medicine chest, and a drink."

He jumped up. "Of course. I didn't think—sorry. Water?"

"First. Then one of the other kind, if everything in my bar isn't smashed."

THEY were still sitting there together, about half a standard hour later, when after much noise of digging and scraping from the direction of the entrance hatch, Leros and a troop of armed men, swords in hand and in full battle gear, appeared in the stateroom's open door. Suomi, who had been listening fatalistically to their approach, looked up at Leros and then closed his eyes, unable to watch the sword's descent.

Nothing descended on him. He heard nothing but a faint multiple clinking and jangling, and opened his eyes to see Leros and his followers facing him on their knees, genuflecting awkwardly on the tilted deck. Among them, looking scarcely less awed than the rest, was the man in gray, armed now with sword instead of hammer.

"Oh Lord Demigod Johann Karlsen," said Leros with deep reverence, "you who are no robot, but a living man, and more, forgive us for not recognizing you when you walked among us! And accept our

eternal gratitude for again conquering our ancient enemies. You have smashed the death-machine within its secret lair, and most of those who served it also. Be pleased to know that I myself have cut out the heart of the arch-traitor Andreas."

It was Barbara who—perhaps—saved him then. "The Lord Karlsen has been injured, stunned," she said. "Help us."

FIVE days later, the demigod Johann Karlsen, he who had been Carlos Suomi, and Athena Poulson, both of them in fine health, sat at a small table in a corner of what had been the Temple courtyard. Shaded from the midday Hunterian sun by the angle of a ruined wall, they were watching the slave-powered rubble clearing operations making steady progress in the middle distance. There the ship still lay, fifty or sixty meters from the Temple complex, surrounded by a jumble of smashed buildings, where it had come to rest after the drive destroyed itself.

Besides the cultists killed inside the ship or executed by Leros later, at least a score of people, most of them people who had never even known of the berserker's existence, had died in the cataclysm. But still Suomi slept well, for millions of innocent folk across the planet lived and breathed.

"So, Oscar has explained it all to me, finally," Athena announced. "They promised him a chance, a fighting chance, to get at the berserker and destroy it if he cooperated."

"He believed that?"

"He says he knows it was a terribly small chance, but there wasn't any better one. They wouldn't let him get on the ship at all. He just had to sit in a cell and answer questions for Andreas and Lachaise. And the berserker too, it talked to him directly somehow."

"I see." Suomi sipped at his golden goblet of fermented milk. Maybe the stuff made Schoenberg sick, but he had found that his stomach could handle it without difficulty, and he had grown to like the taste.

Athena was looking at him almost dreamily across the little table. "I haven't really had a chance to tell you what I think, Carlos," she said now in a soft, low voice. "It was such a simple idea. Oh, of course I mean simple in the sense of something classical, elegant. And brilliant."

"Hm?"

"The way you used your recordings of Karlsen's voice, and won the battle."

"Oh, well. That was simple, to splice together recorded words to make some phrases that a berserker ought to find appropriately threatening. The main thing was that the berserker should identify his voice and so take the strongest, most violent action if could to kill him, forgetting everything else, be perfectly willing to destroy itself in the process."

"But to conceive of it was brilliant, and to do it required courage."

"Well. When I heard that its servants were asking about Karlsen, for no apparent reason, the idea struck me that we might be dealing

with one of those assassin machines, a berserker that had been programmed specifically to go after Karlsen. Even if it was only an ordinary berserker—ha, what am I SAYING?—Karlsen's destruction would rate as a very high priority in its programming, probably higher than depopulating a minor world. I gambled that it would just forget its other plans and wreck the ship, that it would just take it as probable that Karlsen was somehow hiding on *Orion* with a secret landing party."

"That sounds insane." Then, flustered, Athena tried to modify the implied criticism. "I mean—"

"It does sound insane. But, as I understand it, predicting human behavior has never been the berserkers' strong point. Maybe it thought Andreas had betrayed it after all."

THE god Thorun incarnate, who had been Thomas the Grabber, strolled majestically into the courtyard at its other end, trailed by priests and a sculptor who was making sketches for a new spear-carrying statue. Suomi rose slightly from his chair and made a little bow in Thorun's direction. Thorun answered with a smile and a courteous nod.

Carlos and Thomas understood each other surprisingly well. The people had to be reassured, society supported, through a time of crisis. Did Leros and the other devout leaders really believe that a god and a demigod now walked among them? Apparently they did, at least in one compartment of their minds, and at least as long as such belief

suit their needs. And perhaps in one sense it was the truth that Karlson still walked here.

Perhaps, also, the sandy-haired man now known as Giles the Chancellor, who was Thorun's constant companion and adviser, was to a great degree responsible for the relative smoothness with which the society of Godsmountain had weathered the upheavals of the past few days. Alas for the Brotherhood. Well, thought Suomi, likely a world with the Brotherhood victorious would have been no better than Godsmountain's world was going to be without its secret demon.

There was Schoenberg now, walking near his wrecked ship. Barbara Hurtado was at his side listening to him as he pointed out features of the rubble-clearing system the slaves were following. It was a result of his expert analysis of the problem. He had been talking about it yesterday with Suomi. There, where Schoenberg was now pointing, was the place where the mathematically proven plan of greatest efficiency called for all the debris to be piled. Schoenberg had come near being killed as a collaborator by Leros and the winning faction, but intervention by the demigod Karlson had saved his life and restored his freedom.

After what had happened to Celeste Servetus and Gus De La Torre—their mutilated bodies had been found atop a small mountain of human and animal bones in a secret charnel-pit far beneath the Temple—Suomi could not blame Schoenberg or anyone else for collaboration. Schoenberg had told him of the tale of ruthless Earth-

men who were going to come looking to avenge him, a tale that, alas, had been nothing but pure bluff. Suomi, though, still had the feeling that Schoenberg was leaving something out, that more than passed between him and Andreas than he was willing to recount.

Let it lie. The ship had been irreparably damaged, and the surviving members of the hunting expedition were going to have to co-exist on this planet, in all likelihood, for an indeterminate number of standard years, until some other ship just happened by.

Athena took a sip of cool water from her fine goblet, and Suomi drank some more fermented milk from his. She had spent the period of crisis locked in her private room and unmolested—maybe she would have been the next day's sacrifice—until the ship crashed and the Temple was knocked down about her ears. Even then she was only shaken up. She, the independent, self-sufficient woman, and by chance she had been forced to sit by passively like some ancient heroine while men fought all around her.

"What are your plans, Carl?"

"I suspect the citizens here will sooner or later get tired of having the demigod Karlson around, and I just hope it doesn't happen before a ship shows up. I think he'll maintain a low profile, as they say, until then."

"No, I mean Carl Suomi's plans."

"Well." Suddenly he wondered if any of the Hunterians, before the crisis, had heard her call him Carl, as she frequently did. He wondered if that might have contributed to

his being so fortunately misidentified. Never mind.

Well. Only a few days ago Carlos Suomi's plans for his future would definitely have included Athena. But that was before he had seen her so avidly viewing men killing each other.

No. Sorry. Of course he himself had now killed more people than she had even seen die—yet in a real sense he was still a pacifist, more so than ever in fact, and she was not. That was show he saw the matter, anyway.

Barbara, now. She was still standing beside Schoenberg as he lectured her, but she looked over from time to time toward the place where Suomi sat. Suomi wanted nice things to happen to Barbara. Last night she had shared his bed. The two of them had laughed about their minor injuries, comparing bruises. But . . . a playgirl. No. His life would go on just about the same if he never saw Barbara again.

What, then, were his plans, as Athena put it? Well, there were plenty of other fish splashing in the seas of Earth, or even, if he could be allowed a mangled metaphor, living demure and veiled behind their white walls here on Godsmountain. He still wanted a woman, and in more ways than one.

Schoenberg was not pointing up into the sky. Would his rubble pile grow that tall? Then Barbara leaped with excitement, and Suomi looked up and saw the ship.

Next thing they were all running, shouting, looking for the emergency radios that Schoenberg had insisted

on getting from the *Orion* and keeping handy. Some trying-to-be-helpful Hunterian had misplaced the radios. Never mind. The ship lowered rapidly, drawn by the beacon-like appearance of the city atop the mountain, and *Orion* already sitting there. A silvery sphere, similar in every way to Schoenberg's craft. With wild waves Earthmen and Hunterians beckoned it to land on a cleared spot amid the rubble.

Landing struts out and down, drive off, hatch open, landing ramp extruded. A tall man emerging, with the pallor of one probably raised under a dome on Venus, his long mustache waxed and shaped in the form the Earth-descended Venerians frequently affected. Reassured by numerous signs of friendly welcome, he strode halfway down the ramp, putting on sunglasses against the Hunterian noon. "How do, folks, Steve Kemalchek, Venus. Say, what happened here, an earthquake?"

Thorun and the High Priest Leros were still deciding which of them should make the official welcoming speech. Suomi moved a little closer to the ramp and said informally: "Something like that. But things are under control now."

The man looked relieved on hearing the familiar accents of an Earthman's speech. "You're from Earth, right? That's your ship. Get any hunting in yet? I've just been up north, got a stack of trophy 'grams in there . . . show you later." He lowered his voice to a more confidential tone. "And, say, is that Tournament everything I've heard it is? Going on right now, ain't it? Isn't this the place?" •

Reading Room

LESTER DEL REY

THE IDEA of a series of novels closely related to each other is an old one both in general literature and in our field. The Skylark and Lensman series are examples that come instantly to mind—E.E. Smith always needed more scope than one novel could give him to work out his sweeping ideas. And Heinlein's use of a common history for his earlier stories gave a unity and effectiveness that added greatly to his reputation. More recently, Gordon Dickson has been using several separate but related novels to tell the history of the Dorsai.

A series isn't quite the same thing as the average sequel, to which I'm slightly opposed. Usually a sequel seems to be something the author thinks up when a successful book has already been completed, using pretty much the same characters and background situation,

often without the inner conviction of the first book. A series of books requires either a larger frame or a more versatile character to justify it. It may involve direct sequels, but it may also use quite different characters or backgrounds—again as in Heinlein's work.

Most of these seem to grow into existence by their own force, compelling the writer to go on with them, though a few are constructed deliberately. Doc Smith told me he never meant to do more than one story about Seaton and Crane; he certainly never planned to do the final book about DuQuesne, the "villain" of the series. But he did expect to do several books around the Lens. Burroughs tried to get rid of Tarzan, attempting to substitute his son, Korak the Killer. But it didn't work; Tarzan went on through eighteen more books, be-

coming immortal in both a literal and figurative sense.

And even what seemed to be minor bits in that series refused to disappear. La of Opar was a nice character in the second book and she was even better in the sixth. But she wasn't really necessary to the ninth—merely a welcome return. And finally, Burroughs went back to her in the fourteenth, seemingly compelled to bring her out and let her taste the more modern world—and to show us that Tarzan wasn't by any means wholly unmoved by her charms.

And Opar grew in the readers' minds—that fabulous city of beastly men and beautiful women, possessor of untellable riches, haunted by dawn-age religion, the sole survivor of a great prehistoric civilization that might have been Atlantis. That city has haunted the minds of readers ever since Tarzan found it.

Now Philip Jose Farmer has dug through the ancient past to find its true history, and to build a series of stories from this bit of another writer's series. The first novel of this new series is his *Hadon of Ancient Opar* (DAW, \$1.25), with a cover and ten interior illustrations by Roy Krenkel. There are also maps and a short history of the first two millennia of the culture, up to about 10,000 B.C.

Generally, it's good fun. Perhaps the best part is the history and some remarks about an immortal time traveller (here named Sahhin-

dar), who bears a strange resemblance to hero of the author's *Time's Last Gift*, who bore a strange resemblance to Tarzan of the Apes. Ah well, that's Farmer for you; since he's mentioned only casually it's a rather pleasant conceit and ties the sub-series back to the main sequence.

The story is told with no effort to imitate the style or narrative pace of Burroughs and Hadon, for better or worse, is no hero straight from Burroughs' books. The pace is a good deal slower and much more attention to the thoughts and feelings of the characters. On its own merits, the ancient civilization is interesting and the story forms a rather good adventure novel. Except . . .

Well, I've made my opinion plain about books that end without any real ending. This novel ends with our hero pursued hotly, chased into the hills where he makes a stand against his pursuers—obviously an almost hopeless task. And in the last sentence, there he stands—waiting. Phil, how could you! I know many of the early Burroughs books ended on a cliffhanger; I also know there'll be books to follow this. But when one pays for a book he has a right to think it contains a story, beginning, middle—and end!

THERE isn't really very much middle or end—or much good about them—in the latest novel of the series about Gor, the counter-

Earth. This is *Hunters of Gor*, by John Norman (DAW, \$1.50). It's the eighth book in the series; unhappily, I can only hope it is the last.

This time the character of Tarl Cabot, noble warrior of Gor, is almost wholly lost under his present guise of Bosk, the merchant Captain. In the first half of this sprawling book, he sets out to find and capture Talena, the daughter of the great ruler, Marlenus of Ar. Because of love or desire to rescue the maiden? Nope, only for his own greedy ambition. He figures that forcing her to marry him will greatly advance his status. He makes that clear, over and over again. He seems to have forgotten that he has already been a great warrior and an agent of the Priest Kings; in fact, he asserts he no longer serves them. (Thereby cutting off one of the strongest and most appealing themes of the series.)

So he blunders back into the forest where we meet the Panther girls once again. Heretofore, Norman has given us a strong and well-developed *fresh* culture in each of these books; whatever gross faults might intrude in the narrative, those backgrounds were always fascinating. But here he simply goes back to one he has used before—and perhaps the least interesting one. Anyhow, he finally locates not Talena but Marlenus, who makes a fool of him and sends him packing.

Then, because he has been careless, Bosk finds his entire crew captured, and he sets out back into the forest where he's suddenly the mighty hunter, unbelievably and much too simply overcoming the captors of the crew. He goes into the enemy camp single-handedly (and stupidly, since he has a band of his own by then) to overcome them. And, after many more words, he winds up no better off than before he first set out, heading back again to Port Kar and the business he should have been tending to all along. Ho, hum!

Even the sado-masochistic beating of women which has become more and more a major motif of Norman's work is here pretty humdrum, with more repetitive quantity than quality. And the writing is the poorest to be found in any of his Gor novels.

The novel isn't worth bothering with, on any level. A pity DAW picked up where Ballantine Books left off.

AND NOW to move toward a good and important series, we have *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. le Guin (Harper and Row, \$7.95). This is a novel dealing with one of her worlds of the Ekumen, and a story which fills in a great many gaps in the series.

This seems to have been a series which grew larger and richer in the author's mind as time went on. It began with no more than a single

short story in 1964, which then became a part of a short novel of 1966—*Rocannon's World*; it was a good story, but not really a great one. But there were tantalizing hints of quite a history behind it and such devices as the ansible, which let men communicate from world to world, instantaneously across the huge distances of space. That same year, Le Guin turned to another world and culture in *Planet of Exile*. This was a very good novel of besieged descendants of human colonists and their allies, the half-human hilfs. (Hilf: Humanoid indigenous life form.) There were vague hints that there was some connection between the books, but nothing certain. Her third novel, published the following year, *City of Illusions*, showed that she was writing a connected series—but also showed an Earth which was possessed by conquerors that were hard to fit into the structure, though they had been mentioned in the other books. It was a strange story, disturbing in some ways, but showing obvious talent. Then came a masterpiece: in 1969 I devoted half of my first review column for this magazine to praising *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and time has established it as one of the classics of science fiction.

By this time, it was clear that she was writing a tightly connected series, with each book on a different planet, showing a different culture of humanity; and it was now estab-

lished that all these cultures had been planted in the remote past by a humanoid race called the Hain; and that now the Hain were trying once again to contact them and bring them into a vague union (as much philosophic as governmental) known as the Ekumen.

Chronologically, *The Dispossessed* is the first book of the series. It takes place on twin worlds circling Tau Ceti at a time not too greatly distant from our present, apparently; at least Earth is a vastly polluted and wasted planet, totally unlike the forest world of the third book.

The hero is Shevek, born and raised on the bleak and barren world of Anarres, a world populated by an exiled group who rebelled against the government of the home world of Urras. This group believed in a communal, rather anarchistic society, free from the rigid government they had known. *For a more detailed account of this period see Ursula's superb new novelette, THE DAY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION, in the August '74 issue of Galaxy.*

BAEN

Half the book (in alternate chapters of flashbacks) deals with the growing up and development of Shevek on Anarres. And all of that is splendid. Le Guin has faced the problems of putting such a theory of government into practice as well as can be done. It's a living, struggling colony, with all the good and evil that man can adapt to situations of any kind. The life is both

beautiful and horrible. The chapters describing the boy's growth and the struggles of the young man are moving chapters indeed.

But, as the book begins, Shevek has become too great a man for his home world. He is far ahead of all others of his planet in certain esoteric mathematics that lead to the ansible that has linked these books. Despite the hatred toward Urras he shares with all Anarresti, he has to go down to Urras to continue his work. (The authorities of Urras accept him, obviously, to steal that work from him.)

Urras is a fine capitalistic planet, rich enough for the most extravagant capitalistic excesses. Shevek's discovery of Urras's true nature and his efforts to find a way to use his science to help Anarres make fine reading, as does his discovery of Efor, a rather humble but well-characterized friend.

I wish I could go on with superlatives to the end of the book, but unhappily the last ninety pages begin to slip badly. Shevek gets involved in a melodramatic and pointless rebellion that hardly seems to fit what we've previously known of the treatment of the underground-press element, at least. In any event, he fails in his first effort. Then he simply turns to the "embassy" of Hain, gets all the help he wants, and goes home—where, most happily, things have come to a point where they'll let him back. Suddenly the writer seems more interested in getting a

representative of Hain onto Anarres than in what happens to Shevek.

It's not a good ending, or I wouldn't have given that much of it away. It involves stupidity by the hero in jumping out without finding a few facts from Efor he could have learned, and then it involves a *deus ex machina* ending in the form of a Hain rescue. The faults are deeper and sadder than this brief summary, and they destroy much of the strength of the novel. After the marvelous ending of *Darkness*, we had to expect more of the conclusion. I can only hope that some day the author will look at it again, take thought, and rewrite it into the truly excellent book it could be.

Nevertheless, it's a book that should be read by everyone who has read any of the other stories of the Ekumen. From the standpoint of the whole series, this is a key novel. It supplies the history and links that were largely lacking before. It shows the very beginning of what will become the Ekumen and of that which made it possible to go out into space to the other worlds.

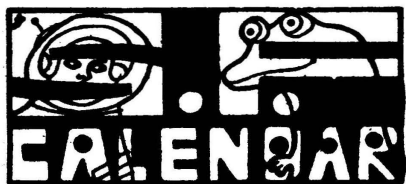
It is also an important key to any other novels in this series that Ms. Le Guin may write. And I hope she will write a great many more. This is a series which can go on and on without ever losing freshness, because each book can deal with a new and ever-fascinating culture

TURNING from series to individual books, I can't help wondering

how Doubleday defines science fiction these days. Take as an example one that clearly calls itself science fiction on the front and backstrap of the jacket: *The Lerios Mecca*, by Gene Lancour (Doubleday, \$4.95).

This isn't at all a bad book, but it isn't remotely science fiction. It bears a resemblance to sword-and-sorcery, but isn't the real thing. This novel depicts a world suited to a semi-barbarian, sword-wielding hero with a great quest and lovely (and annoying) warrior-maid beside him. There are strange bits of more ancient culture. All of which is good. The hero is well-done, and the writing much better than in most recent sword-and-sorcery books.

But there's almost no sorcery.



August 9-11. *FORTFEST '74*. International Fortean Organization. \$10 for members, \$16 for non-members. It's the centenary celebration of Charles Fort's birth. For info: Box 367, Arlington VA 22210.

August 23-24. *BUBONICON VI*. A worldcon warm-up in Albuquerque. For info: PSC #1, Box 3147, KAFB East, Albuquerque N.M. 87115.

The element of magic, necessary for such a tale, is lacking. All we have, really, is the fact that a few men live to very great ages, plus a knife that cuts the hand of the user at a crucial moment according to a prophecy. It isn't really fantasy, much less science fiction. If you like a good tale without category, I might recommend it for casual reading, but don't be fooled.

AND don't be fooled into thinking that *A Midsummer Tempest*, by Poul Anderson (Doubleday, \$5.95), is science fiction either; no matter what it's called. In this case, there's a tiny element of other-dimensional justification, and a way station between the planes. But it's essentially a fantasy—a rather

August 23-25. *AGACON '74* at the Sheraton-Biltmore Hotel, Atlanta, GA. Guests: Thomas Burnett Swan, Poul Anderson, Joe Green. \$7.50 at the door or in advance (Mardi Gras affair—special discount at door with costume) Checks payable to: AGACON '74, Send to: Joe Celko, Box #11023, Atlanta, GA 30310.

August 29-Sept. 2. *DISCON II* at the Sheraton-Park Hotel, 2660 Woodley Road NW, Washington D. C. 20008. GoH: Rober Zelazny, Fan GoH: Jay Kay Klein. Reg: \$5 attending, \$3 supporting. For info: Discon II, P.O. Box 31127, Washington, D. C. 20031.

lovely fantasy, needing no disguise in its category.

Imagine a world much like ours, back a couple hundred years. Then make a few changes. We know of Shakespeare as a great playwright. But in Anderson's world, while Shakespeare wrote precisely the same things, he was a great historian! Every word he wrote was the real history of the world. And the anachronisms we detect in Shakespeare (putting certain inventions and devices into stories where they hadn't been invented yet) are simply caused by the fact that in this world they *were* invented then. So, since inventions create more inventions, the Cavaliers and Roundheads have railways, even though Oberon still holds some sway and Caliban pursues his aged way where he was left.

It's a lovely conceit, in the old and noble meaning of that word. (My only quibble is that there are too many double-dotted vowels in the dialect; maybe we should know that our rustics pronounce both vowels in heat, but it slows up reading.) It's not science fiction, but as a fantasy I can recommend it with pleasure.

FINALLY, not one of a series, but one of a spate: *Wild Card*, by Raymond Hawkey & Roger Bingham (Stein and Day, \$7.95). This is one of those disaster books that run from *Andromeda Strain* through *Hephestos Plague*, using science

fiction tricks and terms, but meant for the general reader, and apparently more and more popular with publishers looking for quick best-sellers.

However, this one is good. And it uses Science with both conviction and skill—and with consistency, which is the rarest quality of all in these books.

The situation takes a world a few years from now where our society is becoming completely fractionated into struggling groups, with crime and violence far out of hand. The President is handed a report and a theoretical cure—the only one the committee could suggest, though obviously it is only half-serious. He must fake an accidental crash by a hostile alien spaceship, and the crash must result in at least 10,000 deaths to be convincing—and the ship and occupants must never be detectable as of human origin. For convincing reasons, he decides to try it, and has a crew assembled.

The situation and the characters are made believable, as is the effort to solve the problem, and the final resolution. That resolution can be carried still further by the reader's imagination in a number of different ways, but it's still a good and stirring ending!

By all odds the best of such books, and within the limits of what I'd consider honest science fiction, though it isn't so labelled. Exciting reading, highly recommended.

*Good guys get all
the unclean matter.*



ANGEL FIX

RACCOONA SHELDON

BY NOT much of a coincidence, when an alien finally landed on Earth he fell into the hands of a good guy.

In fact he was just folding up his parabort heatsheet in Martin Brumbacher Senior's back forty when young Marty came around the alder clump and saw him.

"Hi," said Marty uncertainly, looking at the alien's yellow helmet and the khaki drawers on his skinny little legs, and the mess of gloop on the ground. "Are you, uh, with the survey?"

"'Como' sta Usted?" said the alien. "Ich bin ein Berliner. Mukka hai!" He slapped his helmet. "Ah! Hi there. Well, yes, you might say so. Mind holding this end?"

He passed one corner of the heatsheet to Marty and backed off to stretch it, gripping the edge in his humanoid teeth and kicking the middle to make it fold. He wasn't much taller than Marty.

"You sure have some junk," said Marty, holding his end. "That looks like a flying saucer."

"'On't 'ake 'em 'ike they used to." The alien took the edge out of his mouth and folded some more, shaking his head. "No quality control." He held out his hand for Marty's end.

"Our milker jams all the time," Marty said sympathically. He look-

ed closely at the alien's hand and his eyes popped.

The alien wrestled the heatsheet into a lump that suddenly became a toroid, jammed in a few more items and sat down on it, panting and gazing at Marty with large brown eyes above his droopy mustach. The toroid sizzled faintly. Marty stared back.

"Nice place you have here," the alien inhaled appreciatively. "Lots of *fremth*. You call those cows, right? I thought they were extinct."

"No, they're Ayeshires." Marty swallowed a couple of times. "Uh. Welcome to Earth. I guess."

"Hey, thanks!" The alien grinned and offered the hand. He had a pretty good grin. Marty shook; it felt okay, but hot.

"I suppose you want to see the President or somebody."

"Oh good heavens, no, just a personal pleasure trip. No formalities, please." The alien was still watching Marty carefully. Then he smiled in a relieved way. "I see you're one of the good guys."

"What do you mean?"

"Just checked you out on my Ethical Vibesponder." He pointed to a winky place on his hat. "You test out real high. Honest, brave, truthful, kind, the whole profile. Lucky for me. I mean, a lot of people are hostile to strangers." He

shrugged apologetically. "I don't have any secret zap rays or anything."

Marty could believe that, looking at him. "Yeah. It wouldn't be so good if you landed by Matt's tavern. Or the sheriff."

The alien nodded sadly. Then he brightened. "We have a saying. Every good guy knows at least one other good guy. I mean, I really would like to interact a little while I'm here, if you know somebody else who might accept me."

Marty thought. "Well, I guess Whelan would accept you. I saw his car by the creek. But he isn't anybody important, he's only the warden."

The alien winked. "It is also written, good guys don't win the *phooplesnatch*. Take me to your friend."

So Marty led the alien down to the creek, at the same time asking him a million questions about where was he from and so on which the alien answered as well as he could, astronomy not being Marty's strong subject.

Beside the pasture gate stood a muddy old station wagon. A muddy durable-looking man was coming up from the creek carrying something. The alien stopped.

"Whelan! Hey, Whelan!" Marty scrambled down, talking.

Whelan just kept on walking. When he reached the car he opened the back and threw in a No. 2 trap on a chain. Then he reached back

inside and took out a piece of paw and threw it in the bushes. "Bastards," he said. "Going to kill every goddam thing." He wiped his hands on his pants and turned to the alien.

"What can I do for you, sir? Whelan's the name."

"How do you do, Sir Whelan?" The alien smiled tentatively. "My name is, ah, Joe. Joe Smith. I'm from quite a ways away. I was hoping I could meet a few of you people and, well, talk." He slapped the side of his helmet, frowning.

"Yeah?"

"Really quite a long way." The alien slapped his hat again harder. A wisp of vapor arose from the winky place. "Damn," he said.

"He is an EXTRA terrestrial!" said Marty. "I told you."

"Yeah?" Whelan grinned and pushed his bush hat down over his nose.

"I really am." The alien gazed up at what he could see of Whelan's eyes under the hat. "I see you understand bodily structure, Sir Whelan. Perhaps if I show you—"

He held up his hands, unfolding the extra parts. Whelan stopped grinning. "There is more," the said shyly, starting to unzipper. He looked at Marty. "Perhaps if we just stepped to the other side of the car?"

"Hey," said Marty indignantly. But they stepped around to where he couldn't see anything but the alien's back.

When they returned Whelan's hat was on the back of his neck and he was rubbing his head.

"Listen, this is too much for me. You have to see the President or somebody. I better take you to the courthouse."

"Oh, please, no." The alien clasped his hands. "May we not just converse, personally?"

"I told him about the sheriff," Marty said.

Whelan nodded, not taking his eyes off the little alien.

"What did you want to talk about?"

The alien's mustach trembled. "It's all very informal, Sir Whelan. A mere whim. We happened to notice the way things were going here, I mean, you seemed to be having a few difficulties. Not your fault, indeed not!" He smiled hopefully. "So I thought I'd drop by and offer a small measure of help, person-to-person as it were. That is, if you want it, of course."

"Who's we?" Whelan demanded.

"Oh, merely myself and two very close friends. We happened to be out this way on a pleasure jaunt. Absolutely nothing official in any way, I assure you."

"What kind of help? Hold it, Marty."

THE alien made an embarrassed gesture. "It's only a tiny thing. You might not want it at all."

"Try me."

"Gladly. But—" The alien peered hard at Whelan. "I see you do realize how dangerous it can be to inject something totally foreign into an environment? The possible consequences?"

Whelan nodded.

"If I could assemble a few, well, understanding people. As I said to Marty, good guys. And present it to you as a group? You could talk it over and decide if it seemed desirable."

"I guess that makes sense," said Whelan slowly.

"He says every good guy knows another good guy," Marty put in.

The alien nodded eagerly. "Sir Whelan, could you possibly spare the time to lead us to another trustworthy person? You see I can only stay a few hours. I can't really explain why—hardly understand it myself. Perhaps you know someone who is familiar with a wide range of people?"

"Just plain Whelan's okay," Whelan was starting a different sort of grin. "Sure, why not." He rubbed his head. "Someone I trust who knows a lot of people? Well, there's my wife, but she's at the high school. Doc Murrey? He talks too much. Wait. How about Marion Legersky over at the clinic? She knows a million people and she doesn't talk."

"She's always talking," objected Marty.

"Yeah, but she doesn't say any-

thing. She's okay."

"Oh, thank you!" said the alien. "Do we travel in this?"

They made room among the minnow traps, shovels, wire-cutters, flashlights, blankets, chains and other stuff in the wagon. "Hold on, Marty," said Whelan. "Your pa know where you are?"

"I'll yell as we go by."

"Do that." Whelan revved up the wagon. When they passed the Brumbacher gate at the top of the hill Marty stuck his head out and yelled. Nobody yelled back.

"Lovely place you have here," the alien sighed. "Terfic *fremth*. Dreadful to think you might ruin it."

Whelan grunted. "What is *fremth*?"

"Oh, it's a condition you get from the general electromagnetic configuration. Van Allen something? I never could understand the explanation. Some planets have it, some don't. I personally love it."

He wiggled his thin shoulders. Whelan made a racing corner and zoomed onto the blacktop. The alien clutched at the door. "Do you always proceed so, ah, speedily?"

"Sometimes he goes a lot speedier, don't you, Whelan? Whelan has to catch poachers," Marty told the alien. "Did you catch that real bad one yet, Whelan?"

"Don't talk about it," said Whelan. "Listen, can't you give me a hint about this help you're offering us?"

The alien twinkled shyly, like wait-for-Christmas. Marty could see he wasn't frightened any more. "What would you like?"

"Oh, Christ, Don't quote me, Marty. Well, for starters—go back a couple of centuries and put a flaming sign in the sky saying anybody who dumps anything anywhere has to eat it. And anybody begetting more than two kids should castrate himself. And petroleum can only be extracted in the dark of the moon by left-handed virgins—that kind of thing."

"And Germany shouldn't lose the war," put in Marty. "Hey, Joe, can you? Can you?"

The alien's big brown eyes looked sad and his mustach drooped. "Oh, my dear friends, I hope I have not aroused false hopes. I can't assist you on that sort of scale, I wish I could. Time travel . . ."

"All I want is for you to save the planet before it's too late," Whelan muttered. "Any woman wearing natural fur should have her nose cut off."

"Goodness." The alien swallowed nervously. "Yes, I do sympathize. I fear that what I have to offer will seem very insignificant."

They swerved around the freezer-plant and rolled up Maple Street.

"Here we are."

THE clinic was a one-story brick box in some grass. As they got out the front door opened and a

coat came flying out with a girl halfway into it.

"Marion! Hey—Miss Legersky!"

"Whelan!" The girl whirled around. "Hi, Marty! Listen, excuse me, I have a *date*. Paul called me to go to the game in Green Bay! There's the bus, I'm gone!"

She got her other arm in the coat, dropped her pocketbook and scooped it up running. The Greyhound was down the block in front of Matt's Tavern, chuffing out stink.

Inside the clinic the phone started to ring.

Miss Legersky stopped as if an arrow had hit her and spun around.

"Brenda? Where *are* you? She's late—" She went charging back into the clinic. When they followed her in she was saying, "Yes, Mrs. Floyd . . . No, Mrs. Floyd . . . I'll tell the doctor just as *soon* as he comes in, Mrs. Floyd, goodbye now—what? Oh, yes, Mrs. Floyd, I truly will—"

Outside, the bus was making noises.

"Right. Yes, Mrs. Floyd! Good-bye!" She ran back to the door. They all watched the bus pull out.

Miss Legersky slowly took off her coat. "It could have been an emergency." She sighed and looked around at them, her jaw out. She had beautiful skin. "What's with you all?"

There was a short silence and then everybody started telling her at once.

"What? What?" She looked back and forth and focused on the alien. "*What?*"

"Show her," Marty yelled, pulling at him.

"I think you better take a look, Marion," Whelan said. "Being a nurse and all. The teeth," he told the alien.

The alien opened his mouth. His head was a little below hers. Marty went around behind and looked. In back of the alien's front teeth were green and black zigzags.

"Do you mind if I touch that?" Miss Legersky said faintly. "I'll wash my hands."

"The frontals are artificial," said the alien.

When she put her finger in she pulled it right out.

"Your temperature!" she cried. "You're burning up!"

"Quite normal." The alien seemed a little embarrassed. Whelan started telling her about the other things. When the alien unfolded his fingers, Miss Legersky began grinning in a wild sort of way like a dog laughing.

"I have a third, ah, eye, too." The alien tapped his forehead. "Would it be all right to save that for later? It hurts to pull the cover off."

"I saw him **LAND!**" Marty declared. "Well, practically. He has a flying saucer, it's by our gravel pit. Only he made it shrink."

Miss Legersky was grinning even more wildly. "You, you—you're

from outer space! You really are? *Where?*"

"Well, it's over by the Hillihevio Complex. I don't know what you call it. That way," he pointed, grinning too. Everybody was grinning.

"Why? Why'd you come? Do you know about us? Hey, don't you have to see the President or the U.N. or something?"

"Oh, no, please!" They all explained at once.

"You want to meet my good guy?" She messed her hair around. "Well, you made a start. Who, who? Oh, wow, my old boss in O.E.D. would be perfect, but he's in Detroit. *Who?*"

"Perhaps there is someone you take counsel with about your problems?" the alien suggested.

"My problems? Wow. Well, there's three families didn't get milk since January, Mrs. Riccardi gave me some milk powder. But she's kind of erratic. Problems . . .

Whelan, did you hear the sheriff is throwing Mrs. Kovacs off her farm, she's eight-one and blind? Wait! Cleever. Cleever!" She seized the phone.

"If only he's there, if he hasn't quit or something. He's the new P.D.," she told them. "Court-house? Mary? Is Cleever there? Look, tell him to wait, please, it's urgent! I'm coming over right away, okay, Mary?" She hung up. "Oh my god—Brenda! Where is she?"

"Hey," said a voice in the doorway, "I'm sorry I'm late, my polish wouldn't dry. What's doing? I mean, goodbye," Brenda added as they all rushed out past her and piled into Whelan's car.

Whelan took off backwards so as not to pass the tavern and swooshed around Ray's junkyard onto county road C, with Marion chattering, "Oh, wow, is this real? Can you help us? Can you really, really?"

"It's just a tiny thing," the alien said humbly. "It may not be anything you want at all."

"What *I* want? Oh, hey, I can't—Whelan, is this *real*?"

"Could be," Shelan said cautiously. "Courthouse, right?"

"My goodness, the *fremth*," the alien sighed. "You just can't imagine. Glorious."

"*Fremth* is Van Allen belts," Marty explained. "He digs it. Hey, Joe, what's your planet like? Is it all right if I call you Joe? Are you from the Galactic Federation?"

"What's that?" the alien asked. "Oh, yes, please, Joe."

"Hello, Joe, I'm Marion. Look, Whelan, there's the Moellers, they lost their food stamps. Next time you confiscate some meat could you—"

"They have too goddam many kids," Whelan said. "Besides, it's illegal. Okay."

THE wagon shot over the old bridge and past the Hecker-Giodano pulp works and around

the Foxy Cabins and the Frigo cheese factory into the back end of town. The courthouse had a pizza-colored tower. Whelan turned into some service ruts and parked behind a couple of rusty school buses.

"Close as we go." They all climbed out and hurried around the buses and across the parking lot to the courthouse's back porch. Inside next to the garbage cans was a door saying EDGAR CLEEVER, JR. PUBLIC DEFENDER.

"Cleever!" Marion rushed them all in and started introducing. Cleever was a long tea-colored young Chippewa with a mean expression. He said 'How do' all around, sneering impartially.

"Oh, Cleever, you won't believe this, but Joe's from outer space. I mean, he isn't from Earth. He came to *help* us, isn't that tremendous?"

Cleever's squint stopped on the alien.

"I saw him land," said Marty.

"He *showed* us, Cleever. I mean, I believe it. I really do!"

Cleever squinted at Whelan. Whelan cleared his throat. "Looks like," he said.

Cleever's eyes narrowed to two black pinholes focused on the alien. "Doesn't he talk? Where's his interstellar translator?"

"Actually I don't have one," the alien spoke up timidly. "It isn't really necessary."

"Ah, the faint British accent," said Cleever. "What'd you say his

name was?"

"Joe Smith," Whelan told him uncomfortably.

"Well, it's really more like *Sorajosojojorghtha*," the alien interjected. "Joe seemed easier. I just made up the Smith part."

"So what are you selling? This isn't my day for jollity." Cleever picked up some papers but one ear stayed trained on the alien.

"Oh dear," the alien swallowed. "Obviously I must first satisfy you that I really am from off-planet."

"Good thinking."

"Well, of course, minor physical aspects—" The alien held out his hands and wiggled everything. "But I see that isn't really convincing."

"No," said Cleever shortly.

"I feared not." The alien started tugging at his zippers. Marty just got a glimpse of black, wet-looking things before Whelan hauled him away. Marion took two steps back, her eyes bugging out.

Cleever just looked in silence. His mouth drew down at the ends into two angry cuts. He blinked twice and slowly shook his head.

"Sorry. I really am sorry. But no."

The alien sighed, zipping up. He started to pick at his forehead, wincing a little. A big piece of skin peeled away. Above his nose was a jelly place.

"That's not an eye," said Marty indignantly.

The alien was holding a plastic cup to his forehead. He leaned his

head down and bounced a couple of times. When he straightened up everybody could see.

"Oooh," breathed Marion.

It wasn't like his other eyes but more like a soft, shiny little animal looking out, straight at Cleever. His other eyes looked at Cleever too.

Cleever stared back with terrible ferocity. His fingers hit three drum-taps on the desk. Presently the third eye left Cleever and swiveled around to look at them all. It winked.

Cleever cleared his throat, once, twice. He stretched a hand out toward the alien. The alien nodded and leaned across the desk. Very carefully, Cleever touched the eye. It sort of ducked. Cleever pulled back and exhaled, scowling viciously.

"Okay." He shook himself. "Okay. Provisionally. Now what? What's the scenario? Not the ultimatum, by any chance?"

"Oh, mercy no," said the alien. "Oh, no! Purely a friendly call. Look, would it be all right if I put this back? It's a bit . . ."

"Go ahead. What's your friendly calling on behalf of? The last 'friendly aliens' we had here didn't turn out so good."

"He says he wants to give us something," said Whelan.

"Aha," Cleever snorted.

The alien had his head back, putting the jelly in.

"We," he said muffledly. "I mean, my two companions and I

happened to pass nearby and we couldn't help noticing that things weren't too happy with you. Quite distressing, in fact. Perilous." He smooshed the skin back. "Does this look all right? We've had our calamities too, alas. So I recalled something—a very small item, you understand—that might be helpful and I thought I'd drop by to see if you cared to try it."

"How much?" Cleever demanded.

"Oh Cleever," Marion protested. "He's not selling anything—he wants to help."

"That's right," the alien told him eagerly. "We have a saying. The good guys have to link together."

"Good guys. What's that supposed to mean? I don't dig the black-hat-white-hat line myself."

"Yes, forgive me. A slang expression. How to put it?" The alien chewed on his big mustach. "Well, in situations like yours one does find persons—so few, alas—who are trying to help rather than seeking status or power or material—"

"You keep saying help. What do you mean? Everybody thinks he's helping. General Custer was helping."

"Of course." The alien peered at him anxiously. "Would it help—excuse me—could I say, people to whom the pain felt by others is real? All the pain, the waste. Empathetic, is that it? So real that they

try to, well, stop it?"

"That's beautiful," said Marion.

"Okay, okay," Cleever grunted.

"So what do you want?"

"To make my modest offer of assistance."

"Make it."

The alien looked around, counting. "I had hoped for at least one more . . . for diversity . . ." His voice trailed off timidly.

"He wants like a panel," Whelan explained. "To decide if it would mess things up."

"Who do you want? Ralph Nader? Margaret Mead? Billy Graham? Bella Abzug?"

"He wants your good guy!" said Marty.

The alien nodded. "If you could possibly lead us to someone, well, experienced in the larger ethical implications? Not an official, please. Someone you would trust with a secret of great power."

"Oh, wow!" said Marion.

"Larger ethical implications." Cleever shook his head slowly, staring hard at the alien. "Well, maybe. Provided any of this is real, which I doubt. Let me think. Judge Ball was on my orals, he knows every implication there is. I guess I trust the old bastard. I'd love to see his face—" Cleever was slashing around in his desk. Suddenly he stopped. "Listen, if this turns out funny I'm going to rip you apart. You know that?"

The alien quailed. "Oh, I assure you . . ."

"Be warned." Cleever picked up the phone. "Oh hell, no way. He's in Denver. Next week?"

"Oh dear, it does have to be sooner. Today, actually. My friends were very emphatic."

"I should have my brain serviced," Cleever sneered at the alien. "Look, why don't you go save the world someplace else?"

"Hey!" said Marion. "Doctor Lukas. How about him? I was in his seminar, I trust him. He resigned from N.I.H. because of, you know, Cleever. I told you."

"Lukas? Isn't he in some kind of scientific advisory crap now?"

"He's down at State annex. Pike River, it's only forty miles."

"Call him."

"Oh god, I couldn't," she wailed. But when Cleever got through to Lukas' secretary Marion made quite a good speech about how she was an ex-student and something of tremendous scientific significance had come up and could they please have ten minutes of his time? When the secretary gave in and said Yes Cleever hung his Gone Hunting sign on the door and they all tore out and jumped into Whelan's wagon with the minnow bait and stuff.

"What makes you trust Lukas, Marion?" Cleever asked as the party hurtled down Interstate 101. It was a gorgeous Northlands day. The alien was fluttering his hand out the window and asking Marty the names of things.

"Oh, I don't know." Marion laughed. "The flinch, I guess."

"What flinch?"

"You know. Like all the stuff in the news and after awhile you can't react any more, it's all so horrible, but you go on flinching. Like, twenty million babies starving to death someplace, flinch. Old people abused in stinking nursing homes, flinch, flinch. Eighty billion for new superbombs, flinch-flinch-flinch. You flinch, Cleever. I see you."

"No, Chippewas don't flinch," Cleever snapped. Then he said, "Oh, shit."

ASIREN bansheed up deafeningly behind them.

"It's him. Oh, *no*."

They rolled onto the verge and waited. Boots clumped. Then Whelan's window was filled with a khaki-colored bag of rocks. It had badges and belts on it.

"Hello, folks."

"Hello, Sheriff," Whelan said tonelessly.

"I got to talk to you, boy. What kind of shit you trying to pull with Charlie Orr? 'Scuse me, Miss." The sheriff's large face came down to see who belonged to the legs. When he saw he stopped smiling, which was on the whole an improvement.

"Orr had eight deer carcasses or parts thereof in his panel," Whelan told him.

"He says you tried to drive him off the road at over one hundred miles per hour."

"Well, he didn't want to stop. I had my flasher going, I just eased up behind and nudged him a little."

"Goddam dangerous driving. That car of yours could kill somebody." The sheriff was still bent down, taking them all in with his round blue eyes. "You got stuff on this car that's illegal, Whelan. You setting up to be a law enforcement officer? I got to write you up, boy."

Whelan said nothing.

"Quite a party, I see. Say, you're Brumbacher's boy. Your pa know you're going around with these people?"

"We told him," said Marty.

"Yeah? I think I'll tell him, too. You—" He jerked his chin at the alien. "You new in town?"

"Oh yes sir! I truly am!" They could feel the alien quivering. "Merely passing through, really!"

"Keep it that way. He your lawyer?"

"Oh dear me, no indeed! I—" Cleever nudged him and he shut up.

"Birds of a feather," grunted the sheriff. He pulled his head back out. "I want you in my office first thing tomorrow, Whelan. Hear? And bring this unsafe vehicle with you."

"The charge stands against Orr," Whelan said.

"Sure, sure." The sheriff chuckl-

ed and slapped the car roof. At that instant the alien sneezed, or something. A big ring of lavender light whipped through the wagon and out the window.

The sheriff's face zoomed down at them.

"You got fireworks in this car!"

"Oh, no! No!" cried everybody but Cleever.

The sheriff slapped the roof again, hard. "All right, everybody out." He jerked the door open by Marion.

"Warrant?" said Cleever.

The sheriff rolled his lips and spit out some gum.

"On my authority as sheriff of this county I'm ordering you to assist an officer of the law in performance of his duties. Namely, checking possession of illegal fireworks. Out." He grabbed Marion's arm.

Cleever started unfolding himself. "Let go of her, Claude."

"Look!" cried the alien, pointing ahead.

A car was roaring at them fast, some kind of soap-dish body on big fat tires. Hairy heads were blowing out of the top.

"Haughgh!" said the sheriff, letting go of Marion.

The strange car was almost on top of them. It fish-tailed onto the gravel, showing stones and screeched back into the road by the sheriff's cruiser. *Ping-g-g!*

The sheriff bellowed and took off for his car. The kids got straighten-

ed out and clouted down the road. There were big letters painted on the back. The cruiser tore into a U-turn and took after them, throwing gravel all over.

WHELAN started up and whooshed them out of there.

"Never saw them before," he said. "What was that, a built-up VW?"

"It said 'Love'," Marion giggled. "In purple. Oh, wow, was he mad. I hope he doesn't catch them."

"It did not," Marty told her. "It said Claude Eats Dandruff."

"I saw it. Love."

"Actually, it said White Man Drop Dead," said Cleever. "And it was a green '67 Pontiac."

"I'm sorry," said the alien. "It's hard with so many people. I blur."

"Huh?"

"You mean *you* did that?" Cleever said.

The alien smiled modestly. "Well, I thought—I *hope* it was all right?"

"Oh, it was perfect! Oh, wow! Ho ho ho!" cried Marion.

"You mean they weren't, they—Hey!" Marty bounced around to face the alien. "Do some more! Do some monsters!"

"Oh, I'm not very good at it. It has to be in one's head. That is, the person's head, I mean." He tugged his mustach again. "Ah, Miss Legersky—"

"Marion."

"Marion . . . I must apologize.

That phone call. Mrs., ah, Floyd. That was me."

"What do you mean? I *heard* her."

"No, really. Nobody called. I did it from your head. I'm so sorry."

"You mean Mrs. Floyd never called? But—but, *why*?"

"I had to be sure about you," the alien said pleadingly. "My, my device seems to have quit working."

"His ethical vibrator," Marty explained. "It's in his hat. I saw smoke, Joe."

"Yes. Absolute junk. So I thought, make a test. The worst thing a person is worried about. I'm terribly sorry."

"You mean, to see if I'd answer." She rumbled her hair, staring blankly at the scenery which was rushing by behind some Wonderbread ads. "Cleever, just when I was leaving, I mean, *Paul* asked me—I guess he did," she looked around. The alien nodded. "Anyway, Brenda was late and Mrs. Floyd called—only it wasn't Mrs. Floyd. But the voice and all—"

"I *am* so sorry." The alien's big brown eyes glistened. "Your mating ritual . . ." he said miserably.

"Oh, Joe, it doesn't matter." She patted his hand. "I wouldn't have missed this for anything. And you're trying to help us."

"I *do* hope you won't be disappointed." He clasped her hand. "It's such a tiny thing."

"You have beautiful eyes, Joe." She hugged his shoulders. He

beamed.

"Testing," Cleever said. "I don't recall you trying anything on me. Why not? Professional courtesy?"

"Oh, I *looked* at you," the alien told him shyly.

"It occurs to me," Cleever was squinting again. "Maybe we should have some kind of test. Just for openers, does everybody see this guy the way I do? Whelan, mind telling us what Joe here looks like?"

They all started describing the alien and checking and arguing, while they flew past the oil loading rack and across the Soo tracks and around Earl's Trailer Court and over the bridge into Pine River.

"Oh, Cleever, what does it *matter* about his earlobes," Marion said. "We all see him. Slow down, Whelan, there's the campus."

"I don't know," Cleever said darkly as they rolled into the parking under a lot of maples. "I wish my grandpa was here with his Windigo trap." The alien shuddered.

"Life Sciences," she said. Marion pointed. "That motel-looking one."

They scrambled out from among the axes and jerry-cans and trooped into the Life Sciences motel and found T. H. LUKAS, PH.D., M.D. on a door. Inside was a small office about ten degrees below zero.

"The air-conditioner," his secretary sneezed. "Go right on in."

"Oh, it's fine," the alien assured her. "Really brings out the *fremth*." He followed them into

Lukas' cubbyhole, shivering pleasurably.

LUKAS turned out to be a sturdy little man with a white pompadour, like a serious show-pony.

"Take over, Marion," Cleever said.

"Oh, wow," said Marion and plunged at it. Just as she was saying "outer space" the door opened and the secretary walked in carrying a yellow paper.

"Excuse me."

Lukas opened it and started reading. As he read he slowly backed himself up until he hit the wall. The paper shook a little and his face paled.

Marty suddenly made a loud inhale and Whelan clamped him from behind.

"Shall I send an answer?" The secretary didn't look well either.

"No . . . Oh, yes, of course, Miss Timmons. Ah. Dear Harry. Sincere—no, many congratulations on your appointment. You have all my support. Signed Theo."

"Doctor Lukas, I—I'm so sorry."

He made a vague gesture. "Thank you, Miss Timmons. These things . . . One must hope, the realization of power sometimes ameliorates . . ."

"I know what the realization of power will do for *him*," Miss Timmons marched out.

Lukas smiled a little effortfully and pulled himself back to his desk. "Do forgive me—Miss Leger-

sky, isn't it? Please continue."

She'd just started to talk when the alien murmured something and quickly sidled out the door. "Oops," said Cleever and whipped out after him. Marion went on talking.

When they came back in Lukas was standing up.

"You . . .?" He peered at the alien, shaking his white head and smiling tiredly.

"The eye," said Cleever. "Show him."

"It isn't really necessary now." The alien's mustach seemed to have perked up.

"I know. You better tell him that, too. She'll send that wire."

"Oh, no," the alien shook his head, smoothing his mustach. "I have an electronic sweet-tooth," he confided. Then he sobered. "Doctor Lukas, I must apologize for your distress. That telegram does not exist."

"What?"

"Oh, *Joe*!" cried Marion.

"Really. Look on your desk, where you put it. Nothing there."

There wasn't. Lukas ran around looking, with his eyebrows going higher and higher.

"That's his thing," Cleever explained. "Testing. He says he uses the worst thing you can think of."

"Only in emergencies," said the alien. "It's very draining. Please forgive me."

"Amazing!" Lukas blinked and began to smile. "Well! Yes, my

goodness! That certainly is a feat, Mr. Joe, is it? But, regretfully, I cannot accept it as, ah . . ."

"Of course," the alien agreed.

So they showed him everything, with Lukas getting more and more excited. By the time they were doing the eye his eyebrows were up by his pompadour and he was peering at the alien with a pocket lens.

"A pineal analog? Impossible, see the ancillary structures . . . Why, that isn't hair, either—" The eye swiveled, apparently enjoying itself.

"We should get to the business," Whelan interrupted. "I'd like to see this gismo he has."

"Button up, Joe. Somebody might come in."

"Well, well, well!" Lukas repeated while the alien put himself together. "Well! Now. Whom to call first?"

"No, no! No!" They told him. The alien began to explain about how this was a private thing he wanted to offer to a small group. He was choosing his words with great care, glancing nervously at Cleever.

"—persons of, how shall I EXPRESS IT? Of altruistic temperament, of low dominance-submission orientation? Unexploitative?"

Lukas looked puzzled.

"I see in your mind the terms 'non-agonistic behavior'. Pronounced et-epimeletic tendencies?"

"Ah," Lukas replied. "You mean the good guys!" Marion giggled.

"But how marvelous! You offer to help us? You really mean this?"

"In a small way." The alien started feeling around in his clothing. "A very small way. That is if you . . ." He frowned, tried another place.

Lukas was gazing over their heads. "An inhibition, perhaps, against destroying each other? Such as Lorenz—so petticially if quite unfoundedly—believes is to be seen among wolves? We do seem to need it more than wolves." Absently he rubbed a tattooed place on his arm. "Is such a thing possible?" He demanded urgently. "Can you stop man destroying man?"

"There goes the planet," said Whelan.

The alien's face was sorrowful. "Doctor Lukas, I regret. What you suggest *is* possible, in a way. But it would require—Oh, to begin with, an official project, a huge organization, funding, authorizations, coordinations, impact studies . . . I see you understand."

Cleever snorted.

"Yes." Lukas breathed out blowily. "I understand."

"I'm so sorry about your family," the alien said softly.

Lukas started. "You really do read minds?"

"When the thought is so prominent."

"And you can't bring back the dead either, I'm sure. Or—could—" Lukas' face changed. "Oh, no. Forgive me. But now, let

us see! What do you bring?"

THE alien pulled out a small crumpled packet which promptly swelled up into a lobed pouch.

"It's quite safe," the alien said. "Now, the point is—"

There was a very fast knock on the door as Miss Timmons came in.

"Doctor Lukas, may I use your phone? My line is dead."

"Oh," said the alien. "Ah, Doctor Lukas."

"So that's what you were doing," Cleever said. "Sir, maybe you should mention about the telegram."

"Of course. Miss Timmons, it won't be necessary to send that wire. I have determined that the message was an, ah, error."

"A joke," Cleever added grimly.

"What a perverted, horrible—"

"Yes, yes, it's quite all right." Lukas smiled at her. She glared at each of them in turn and strode out.

"I should repair it," the alien said anxiously.

"Later, we don't want any calls."

"True. Well, as I was saying, the point is fatigue."

"Fatigue?" they echoed blankly.

"Yes, on the part of the good guys. We have a saying, the good guys get all the unclean matter."

"I follow you," said Whelan.

"And we say also, good guys are stupid enough to care. So they keep trying. But there are so few of them and they are always suffering hurts

and defeats and unclean matter. A terrible strain. They become tired."

He looked around. Nobody nodded; nobody had to.

"And so they wear out, they weaken. Unable to go on. Perhaps dead. The society suffers, error and evil triumph. So I thought to bring you refreshment, for the good guys."

"Drugs," grunted Cleever. "Shit."

"Oh, no!" The alien looked shocked. "Tell me—have none of you experienced a desire to go *away* for a time? To have a secret beautiful place free from evil and greed, without—is 'hassles' the word? Wait—" He looked at Marion. "Where there is only sympathy and understanding and the deer and the antelope play?"

"Ohhh," breathed Marion. "You mean like vacations?" Then her smile faded. "I went to Yellowstone. It's wall-to-wall crud."

"A travel agent." Cleever's teeth showed.

"Oh, please, this is a gift! A very modest gift, I'm afraid. But you see," the alien said earnestly, "We have *experienced* these problems. Really. We learned that if one can relieve the stress for a time one returns refreshed. Renewed! Able to carry on, to accomplish more. To flourish like the green tree."

"Hey Joe, where is it?" Marty asked. "How do we go?"

"Observe, please." The alien opened a lobe of the bundle. An ob-

ject fell out. "No, wait; wrong culture." He pushed it back and tried another.

"That looked like an Afro comb," Marion said. Everybody was peering madly.

"I do *hope* you like it." The alien pulled out a shiny little thing.

"Car keys?"

"For camouflage. Unremarkable and owned by everyone, is it not? Now, if you will move back from the center of the room—good, good. See. I hold the key up, so, and tap upon it. Twelve times."

His finger made twelve even taps. "Ooohh! Ahhh!"

In the middle of the room stood a faint, shimmery bubble about the size of a big refrigerator.

"That is the gate. Now, to enter—"

"Wait one minute," said Whelan. "What's in there?"

"Oh, nothing at the moment. See—it's quite empty." The alien walked into the bubble and out again, waving his arms. "It synchronizes two points. You go in here and come out there. I forget the technical name, time-independent-null-dimensional-something. Our transportation industry makes it."

"Does it work?" asked Marty.

"Oh yes. They haven't recalled one for ages."

"I thought you came here in a flying saucer," Cleever said.

"Oh, naturally. I didn't need a *permanent* hook-up, you wouldn't

build a highway just for one—"

"Okay."

"Where does it go? I want to try it," Marty and Marion said together.

"No," Cleever and Whelan spoke as one.

Lukas advanced on the bubble and thrust his hand in. "I am the oldest; I am expendable. I shall test it."

"Oh, no, Doctor Lukas—"

But the alien was already showing him. "When you are inside, tap the key again like this." He tapped three slow, three fast, three slow. "Your emergency signal, I believe? To come back, just re-enter and repeat the taps." He handed Lukas the key. "Please come right back, won't you? Your friends are bound to worry. Oh, I do hope he likes it," the alien added as Lukas advanced into the bubble.

They saw his pompadour lift slightly, like a brush charge. He held up the key and tapped it. Nothing happened.

The alien put his head in and said something. Cleever snickered.

"It has to be quite forceful," the alien said apologetically when his head came out. "This is a used model. But very reliable, I assure you."

"Sure, sure," said Cleever. They could see Lukas tapping hard.

All of a sudden he and the bubble weren't there any more.

"Holy mother of us all," whispered Whelan.

"Is he all right?" asked Marion breathlessly just as the door opened and Miss Timmons' head came in.

"Is everything all right, Professor? Doctor Lukas! Where is he?"

"He stepped out for a minute," Marty said loudly. "Hah hah hah!" Whelan grabbed him.

"D-didn't you see him go by?" said Marion. "He said he'd be right back."

The phone in the outer office rang. Miss Timmons looked to and fro wildly and finally backed out. Cleever went over and leaned on the door.

"**A**LL RIGHT, YOU. *Get him back,*" Cleever snarled.

"Oh, I *can't*—" The alien took one look and scooted behind Marion. "Please, do not—"

The bubble and Lukas suddenly popped back in the middle of the room. Lukas stepped out slowly, a strange expression on his face.

"Virgin . . ." he said to the alien. "It's virgin, isn't it? The air—" He sniffed. "I hadn't realized it was so foul here. But so lonely . . ." He turned to the others. "Yes. You find yourself in a large, a very large pavillion. Looking out upon a virgin world. All quite empty."

"The reception area. We put it up," the alien said. "Did you like it?"

"Let me, let us," the others clamored.

"Of course!" The alien handed keys around. "May I suggest you go in pairs? The bubbles must be in different spots, you see. Perhaps if we push this desk?"

As they pushed Miss Timmons began to pound on the door. Lukas stuck his head out. "Elvira, do not be alarmed. Everything is quite all right. We're working on something."

He turned back just in time to see Marion and Cleever go bubble-pop. The next minute Whelan and Marty were gone too.

Lukas leaned on the desk, puffing a bit. "Do you think," he asked the alien, "Elvira—Miss Timmons has been with me for years. Might it be possible—?"

"Oh, I *want* you to bring friends!" the alien beamed. "And your friends shall bring friends, as many as possible shall have refreshment! But—Doctor Lukas, this is very serious; you must impress it on them after I have gone: *The gate is for good guys only*. You see, there is a scanning device, I have no idea how it works. It's sensitive to, well, emotions. If a person who emanates hate or cruelty or greed tries to use it, it goes null. Ffft!" He gestured. "Key, person, all gone. So you see why I was so careful in testing you."

"The needle's eye," Lukas marveled. "God in heaven, it's the needle's eye." He looked sharply at the alien.

"Oh, no, no!" said the alien,

backing up a little. "An ordinary being, I assure you. A mere technological convenience."

"I see . . ." Lukas rubbed his arm absently. "Well, surely if I passed Elvira need not fear." He drowned. "But how is it you have such a planet empty? It seemed a paradise."

"No *fremth*," the alien told him. "So many are like that, your place here is quite an exception. The magnetic field-forms," he explained, as Marion and Cleever popped back into the room.

They came out both talking at once.

"Did you like it?" the alien asked eagerly.

Marion just kept on saying, "Oh, oh, oh." Cleever took a deep breath.

"Yeah. When do the developers arrive?"

"It appears they don't!" Lukas was telling them what the alien had said when Marty and Whelan popped out in the corner.

"Man," said Whelan. "Did you see those mountains? Sure hated to come back."

"And the big lake," shouted Marty. "Is that the *ocean*? Hey, Cleever, I bet there's BUFFALO there!"

"Chippewas don't dig buffalo," Cleever told him. He seemed unusually springy on his feet.

"And the flowers, the sun," Marion sighed. "I bet you could grow stuff in that meadow by just

throwing down seeds."

"Wait," Whelan said. "How do we know the soil isn't poisonous to us? Or the water, how about that?"

"Completely compatible," the alien assured them. "Of course we only sampled here and there, but you and I are much alike. Very common. Be cautious. I did eat quite a few fruits. Delicious!"

"You were there?"

"When we made the pavillions. Now please—*Did* you like it? Will it provide refreshment? Do you think it will help?"

"Oh, yes! Yes! Yes!" They were all grinning, even Cleever. Marion hugged the little alien. "You've made such a beautiful thing for us, how can we ever thank you?"

The alien glowed, beamed, tugged his mustach. "Oh, it was nothing. Foam, mostly. You may have to fix the roof. Oh dear," he looked at Whelan. "The time! Could you take me back to my ship?"

"This I *must* see." Doctor Lukas raised his voice surprisingly. "Miss Timmons! Elvira! Cancel everything for today—and wait!"

They all swarmed out clasping their keys and climbed in among Whelan's water samples and bumper-jacks. When they were bowling back up 101 the alien said, "Now I mustn't forget anything." And he went over what he'd told Lukas about bringing their friends but being careful about it.

"Imagine!" said Marion. "A

whole planet full of only good guys!"

"Not too damn full," said Whelan.

"Can I bring my raccoon?" Marty asked.

"There goes the ecological balance." Whelan groaned. But he kept on grinning.

"Raccoons are good guys!"

"Before we get into an ethical evaluation of raccoons let's see if there's anything more he should tell us," said Cleever.

"I nearly forgot," the alien said, "There's a key-dispenser by the washrooms. I think you should always carry two, don't you? In case you lose one."

"What happens if the wrong guy finds a key?"

"Oh, it's most unlikely anyone would perform the code by chance. But if he did, well, that would be the end of that, I'm afraid."

"Hey," Marion said, "Let's give the sheriff one!"

The alien looked at her. She caught his eye and her head began to go back and forth. No. "... it was just a thought."

"Watch those thoughts," said Cleever.

"I wouldn't *contaminate* it!" she said indignantly. "Oh, I can't wait. I'm going to find some of that fruit for Mrs. Kovacs."

THE alien sighed happily. "I'm so gratified. If only my next stop goes as well."

"Where? Who?" they asked.

"We thought, a nucleus in each large land mass, you know. Just time. I go down that way—Brazil, is it? And one more place. I have it coded."

"That explains the Afro combs," Cleever muttered. "You won't be too lonesome, Doctor."

"But *good* guys," Marion reminded him.

"I thought I saw something move just as we were leaving," Whelan said. "Over on the far side."

"Really! Oh, how marvelous, that means one of my friends has found a suitable group. What good news. We worried about that, you know." He smiled bravely. "We're quite vulnerable. You *are* somewhat intimidating, you know."

Marion hugged him some more and they alternately chattered in bursts, then fell silent in excited thoughts while Whelan zoomed them back up the highway and bounced into the shortcut to Marty's father's farm.

"We're going to kick ourselves for not asking you a couple of million things," Cleever said as they rushed over the last hill. "Oh Jesus. In the yard."

They peered out as the Brumbacher farm went by.

The sheriff's cruiser was standing by the pigsty.

"Keep on going!" Marty yelled. "The creek's out of sight."

"He's going to bust out after us in two shakes." Whelan kept going,

watching the mirror. "There! He's running out of the barn."

"Quickly," the alien was wriggling around, pulling tubes out of his suit. "If you will just drop me where we came out. I can use my invisibility inducer." He pulled out some grids. "I hope."

"Can't you make a monster?" Marty asked as they shot down the hill.

The alien connected things frantically. "I'm so tired. This is much easier—if it works."

Behind them they heard the sheriff's car, *Vrrooomm*.

"We shan't see your vehicle," said Lukas disappointedly.

"We won't see you again," Marion cried. "Oh, Joe dear! Please come back!"

The alien was pushing part of his apparatus into his mouth. His eyes rolled appealingly and he tried to nod. Whelan stood on the brakes. They were by the creek gate.

The *vrrooomm* got louder.

"Here he comes, Hurry, Joe!"

The alien scrambled out. His invisibility thing uncurled down around his shoulders like an overwrought tuba. He straightened up and started working various buttons. Nothing happened.

"Hurry, Joe! Hurry!"

The alien's eyes popped, he fiddled and punched feverishly, backing into the gate to push it ajar. A siren blared to life at the top of the hill.

"Look, he's shimmering! He's

thinning out!"

"Oh, goodbye, goodbye! Dear Joe, thank you!"

The sheriff's car was scorching down the hill, warble-horn going.

"Good luck, Joe! Oh, thank you!"

"Hey—his foot!"

The alien had melted into a heat-wavy place in the air except for one solid foot. It ended in a pinkish blur. The foot stamped a couple of times and they heard a faint voice, apparently swearing.

Just as the cruiser growled up beside them the foot turned and started hopping through the gate.

"Marty, you better get out," said Whelan through his teeth. "Just bringing him home," he shouted at the sheriff.

Everybody was trying not to look at the solitary foot leaping down the pasture path. "See you later," they said to Marty as he climbed out and headed back up the road to his house.

The sheriff's face came down to the window.

"You—the guy with the fireworks. Okay, out."

"I am Professor Theodore Lukas of the state university department of Life Sciences," said Lukas stiffly. "Mr. Whelan is assisting me in a scientific investigation."

"Professor, huh?" The sheriff's blue stare jabbed around. Then, surprisingly, he straightened up and slapped the roof.

"All right, move on. Move on,

you're blocking the road."

"He's overdue at Matt's about now," Whelan explained as they moved briskly on. "Oh, man. Know what I'm going to do? Soon as we get the professor home I'm going to pick up some groceries and take Helen back on the old logging road. Nobody'll find the car. We're going to have ourselves a weekend in heaven!"

"You won't be alone," they laughed.

"I hope to Christ these keys work better than his invisibility whoosis," said Cleever.

"We'll have to watch out for Marty." Marion was sniffing a little. "Oh, I wonder, will he ever come back? He was such a *sweet* person."

"It just occurred to me," Cleever remarked reflectively. "He never did use that thing himself."

"Oh, *Cleever!*"

BACK in the pasture the alien was humming happily as he expanded the modules of his little ship. He was thinking about coming back. Every so often he stood up and shivered, letting the *fremth* do its stuff.

When he had everything assembled he opened his communicator circuits, keeping one eye on an Ayeshire heifer who was becoming curious. An excited voice answered him.

"You can't guess what I ran into," the voice chattered in his own language. "A whole town full of heavy *disarmament* types! From all over. Place called Geneva. One of them's already planning to move his family out. How'd you do? Hey, is the *fremth* this good where you are?"

"Fantastic," said the alien known as Joe. "My group went beautifully, such nice people. I feel sure that they and their friends will decide to leave this planet permanently after a very few visits."

"Mine too," the voice chuckled. "And as we always say, when all the good guys go, goodbye planet. How's Shushli doing? If he's having the same luck we'll have this place ready to go in no time."

"Shushli here," said a new voice. "I'm doing great, in fact I'm running out of keys. Place called Siberia. Pathetic, isn't it? Absolutely ripe. I tell you, there won't be a sane mind left on this planet in a couple of their ridiculously short generations."

"Yeah," said Joe happily. "I just hope the sickies don't mess the place too badly before they wipe themselves out. Well, I must move along. Shoo!—Not you, a cow. An animal." Joe stood up and took one last shiver. "Listen, guys, we better start thinking about our sales brochures. And be sure to stick an official seal on your recorders, will you? You know—folks will never believe the *fremth*."

tube

Or not tube . . . that is the question.



G. C. EDMUNDSON

AFTER being stranded in Afghanistan one develops caution.

But then, there are blue sky deals and there are blue chip deals. One of these days I'll be back on top again but for the moment things are in their usual state of bloody flux. That's 18th century slang for

an illness that . . . Oh well, it all boils down to the same thing.

Lower than Educational TV, what can you get? They were getting me. When an agent asks, "B.J., would you like to do something for NET?" the answer is some crushing and original variant on,

"You've got to be kidding." But one says those things when all is well. At the moment, thanks to some bandit who forgot the ones in the Khyber Pass are *real* bandits, I needed money. So I took up three minutes saying, "Sure I can do it."

After the landlady and the alimony were stalled off for another week I sat down and tried to figure out what I had to do. Educational TV for Christ's sake! Next I'll be barking for trained fleas.

A uniform topped with a pimply face pounded on the door and handed me a large manila envelope. I signed and outstared him for the tip. When I spread the material over the table I had to admit it wasn't bad. In fact it was so good I even got to wondering if maybe I wouldn't like to watch that kind of program myself some wintry evening—if I could ever bring myself to watch anything, that is.

It was anthropological do-it-yourself. By the time a viewer got through seeing an Indian pressure-flake flint he'd be able to fake a Folsom point as well as the next man. One program would demonstrate how Polynesians dig out a canoe using nothing but fire and shells. A man was going to build a log cabin with a stone axe. Another program would show cabinet-making techniques in 11th dynasty Egypt.

The only unusual thing about the program was the budget and shooting requirements; this thing had a

robber baron's Conscience Fund Foundation behind it and somebody wanted no studio work, no process, no dramatization, none of the usual fakery—and color yet! Christ amighty, half of those spare bedroom NET studios couldn't even transmit color and yet the old robber baron's nervous nephews wanted it all Super Colossal!

It was going to cost money—lots of it. And I was going to get some of the wonderful stuff. Common sense returned and called my bank. No, the check hadn't bounced. Yes, credit had been authorized up to ten mill—I was excited again.

WORD gets around in this business. I didn't call—they called me. In three days I had a company.

We started blocking out scripts and Honig went to work breaking the first one down into a shooting script—which makes no sense to an outsider but one hell of a lot to an accountant since it puts scenes not in chronological order, but in economical sequence to use available light and keep the cast together. Do all water-hole shots in one day, for example, even if they're going to be sprinkled through twenty-six finished films.

I rescued a cello-throated Shakespearean playing pageants in Taos and we had our voice-over with enough gray-haired good looks left to do the intros. It was going well under budget.

It promised to be really good, miles above the usual prime-time shlock.

And then I ran into trouble.

You expect trouble in this business: public outcry—all the usual crap about shlock programming and payola for broadcasting licenses. But here I'm trying to put out a good program—the kind of program a guy who reads without moving his lips might enjoy watching—and the F.C.C. was giving me all kinds of static!

I told my agent to get the Conscience Fund Foundation on it and next morning he got me out of bed to explain that the fine print laid that part of it all on me.

I got hold of an expert in Washington who knew how to grease the agency. Nobody could be fixed. That's when I started getting suspicious. There is *always* somebody with his hand out.

There's a kind of mentality that sees deep dark plots in everything. Something to do with a deprived childhood or not enough breast feeding or some damn thing. After a week of horsing around getting nowhere I started developing that kind of mentality.

I can understand payola. I can understand having to grease somebody to get things moving. I can even understand some freshman senator making vote-getting noises about Vast Wastelands. But here I was trying to produce something really good and nobody in the gov-

ernment seemed to be interested—not just uninterested; they went out of their way to make things impossible.

"Who hates you?" my agent asked.

"Somebody down there doesn't like me," I conceded. But I really couldn't think of anybody—not that I haven't made enemies—but none of them were in a position to sabotage things the way this project was going down the spout.

Then I got another phone call.

"Mr. Gortiz?"

"Yes."

"This is Edgar Pendergast."

I tried to remember the name but nothing happened. I made frantic motions for my girl to do what she should have done before connecting me but she was tripping out over a wad of gum.

"I'm vice president of the Conscience Fund Foundation," Pendergast said. Suddenly the chill wind of an Afghanistan winter shot through my soul.

"We've been reconsidering," Pendergast said in round, foundation-shaped tones. "I'm afraid we are going to have to call the project off."

Before I could remind him that we had a contract he continued, "We'll pay you, of course. And you might want to keep your troupe together. Perhaps in a month or so, once the dust has settled we can get together and dream up some other kind of public service program."

I mumbled something and got off the line.

IT JUST didn't make sense. Sure, I've been shafted before. But not this way. It was as if the Conscience Fund Foundation really did have a conscience. Somebody felt guilty and somebody was buying me. What for?

Now that my immediate financial worries were over I had another problem. You're only as good as your last and my last hadn't happened—though I had sixteen cases of exposed film sitting in my apartment, next to my television set. I had to get something going soon or I'd end up in some goddam wax museum. Besides, it bent me out of shape. The first time in my life I ever tried to produce a really good program and here I was, shafted up to the sweetbreads.

I decided to do something wild, crazy, extravagant. With my own money I hired an investigator. Not a hundred-dollar-a-day divorce expert. Not a Watergate Wonder-Boy. The guy I hired called himself an advocate. I called him a lobbyist.

There's nothing deader on this whole festering planet than a dead TV deal.

But I wanted to know *why*.

Personally, I tended toward the deep dark plot theory, but then I'm paranoid. Besides, now that it had been killed somebody should have been gloating, and making sure I

found out why.

While my high-voltage gumshoe was padding down the corridors of power I considered the possibilities. There were plenty of ordinary commonplace ones but they would all have gossiped back to me by now. Suddenly another one hit me. That whole goddam series of anthropological do-it-yourself—it had been a survival course!

Somebody *knew* something. I started watching Walter Cronkite. Same old crap. The Cambodians had finally gotten it through their little heads that if Glorious Leader didn't get those MIA's back soon the silent majority probably wouldn't say a word after the Bomb was dropped, except maybe to suggest the second one land on Sweden. But Kissingkraut must have convinced Moscow and Peking too. Things hadn't looked better for a generation. The Arabs were even hinting that some of their best friends . . .

Scratch one theory.

At home Glorious Leader was screwing the poor, welshing on every campaign promise and giving it all to the little men in black pyjamas who had suddenly become our allies, essential to our best interests in . . . It was business as usual.

The dollar was dropping, Europe was screaming, and it wasn't really all that bad now that young Europeans were buying Mustangs instead of Black Forest Brand X.

The Russians were going for color TV in a big way. Every country had its own color network now. China had agreed not to jam the satellite relays. It looked like we were going to be just one big happy family, even if Old Glorious had reversed himself again and cut off the programs that might have kept that family down to manageable size. So why was somebody stopping me from producing a decent TV program?

It had to be a conspiracy. I'd tried too hard, run into too many stone walls. Two weeks and nobody had snickered or gloated. Somewhere in a back room evil men in hoods sat around a table and . . .

My gumshoe rang me. "You're not alone," he said. "Bill Buckley's been canceled."

"So what else is new?"

"Doesn't it strike you odd that in spite of all the government's feuding with the media, just about everything right-of-center is getting canceled?"

"Of course it's odd. Now tell me why it's odd." For this I'm paying a gumshoe real devalued American dollars?

"I'm working on that," he said and hung up.

Meanwhile, not only was I watching Walter Cronkite; I was starting to read the papers. I even read the classifieds.

It was no use. No cryptic 'personals'. No little men in hole-in-the-wall stores to lead me into

extradimensional adventures. Even the 'object, carnal knowledge' ads were unimaginative.

One of the more image-minded corporations was getting hit with another anti-trust suit in return for its latest public-service program educating the citizenry in the outs of government. A communications conglomerate was being warned about a radiation hazard in their new line of color TV's but since a jap set selling at half the price and emitting twice the radiation was outselling them that was the least of their worries. Somebody was promising gasoline rationing this summer and no fuel oil this winter. America's birthrate was at its lowest since World War II. Somebody in Africa was starving, having managed to outbreed Borlaug's Miracle Mealie-mealies. And my gumshoe was still running up a bill. I decided to call him off and fold up the company while I still had a dime left for my old age.

MY AGENT called. "Everything is supercolossal again!"

"We're going to do the series?"

"No, that one's dead and gone."

"So what is it this time?"

"Situation comedy—This POW comes home after nine yers. He's never seen a mini, doesn't even know brassieres will burn."

"Where's the comedy?"

"Each episode his wife comes on with something new. First off, she's living with three other guys. Next

one, we put his daughter in a commune."

"This is comedy?"

"It all depends on the treatment."

"You don't want me; you need Evelyn Waugh."

"Don't you want to do the show?"

"I didn't say that," I sighed. "It just takes a little getting used to."

"So it's on?"

"Yeah."

"You don't sound very happy about it."

"I'm delighted." I hung up and poured myself a drink. Here was my chance for another Emmy. Ought to top Archie Bunker any day. I hadn't disbanded my company yet. Better Call Honig and get him to working up a shooting schedule. Shlock Rides Again! You could bet your life nobody was going to shoot this one down. An administration that favored the crap that was going out in prime time now would stand for anything—except intelligence or good taste.

Suddenly a great light burst. I wondered if this was what the mystics meant when they maundered on about Illumination. To me it was more like an old fashioned cartoon. I could almost see the light bulb encased in a little balloon floating over my head. The trouble was, I had a production company. Now who the hell knew anything about the technical side of the business?

I found the man I wanted. Not in a TV repair shop where you might expect.

"Ruined," the X-ray technician said. "I don't know where you've been storing it but this film's picked up enough radiation to sterilize twenty generations of fruit flies and half the population of Biafra."

Knowing that I'd been expecting that answer did nothing to stop the sinking feeling in my stomach. At last I knew why. Now my only problem was ethical. Knowing why didn't tell me what to do about it.

People were made to be managed. I'd been producing shlock all my life, reminding myself each time I went to the bank that Mencken was right: No man ever went broke under estimating the American taste. So I'd done one decent thing in my life—tried to produce a good TV program. And what had it gotten me?

I'll do the POW comedy. Why not? Somebody else would anyway. But I really wonder. I wonder if, twenty years from now when the Selecting is all done, somebody might not discover that *his* kids watch shlock too? Somebody watches those cruddy shows. And since when can even a Right Wing mother convince her precious genetic heir not to glue his nose to that X-ray emitter? But you don't catch *me* watching that gonad-shriveling shlock. From now on I'm not even watching Cronkite!

Galaxy

GALAXY/IF S-F MART

235 East 45 Street
New York, N.Y. 10017



50¢ per word per issue (including name and address) or 3 issues (two GALAXY & one IF) for \$1.00 per word. 10-word minimum. Payment with order.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

SCIENCE FICTION. US, British. Out of Print Books, Fantasies, Anthologies. Paperbacks Autographed and First Editions. Extensive Illustrated Lists, 10 cents. HJMR, GXY, Box 610308, North Miami, Florida 33161

WANTED TO BUY—All issues of science fiction and fantasy magazines from 1926 to date. Harry Bennett, 6763 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA. 90028

BOOK & MAGAZINE READERS! Send wants to: S & S Books, G-6, 80 North Wilder, St. Paul, Minn. 55104

ILLUSTRATED CATALOG of SF-Fantasy books. Over 2,000 titles listed. Send 25 centss for one, \$1.00 for next 4, or \$2.00 for four consecutive catalogs plus Silverberg's "Dying Inside" a \$6.25 publisher's edition SF book. Send to: Purple Unicorn Books, 4532-G2 London Road, Duluth, Minn. 55804

LOGIC NEWSLETTER Logic design and construction. Sample copy \$1.00. LOGIC NEWSLETTER, POB 252, Waldwick, New Jersey 07463.

MISCELLANEOUS

FANTASTIC ANIMAL STATIONARY by Bonnie Dalzell; Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's SAVE ME A PLACE BY THE RAIL available soon. Send 50 cents handling charge for catalogue. Orangetree Press, 1413 Allston Way, Berkeley, Calif. 94702.

DATES GALORE! Meet exciting singles. All areas. Free application, write: DATELINE. 400-A Hopeland, Dayton, Ohio 45408.

JOIN WORLD PARTY for world federation. Write Mark Terry (Chairman), P.O. Box 2786, San Diego, Calif. 92112\$

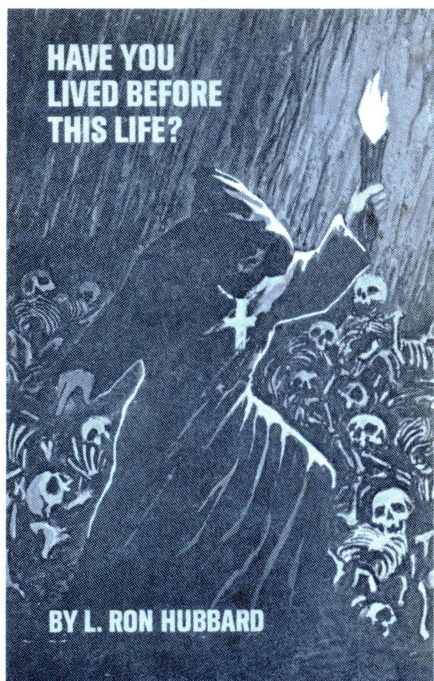
SEMI-PRECIOUS

JEWELERS! HOBBYISTS! Genuine highest-quality cut & polished Southwestern turquoise stones available in retail and bulk. Stones range in size from two to two-hundred carats. Retail prices: Morenci, \$1.00/carat; Bisbee, \$1.25/carat; Royston, \$0.80/carat. Wholesale prices negotiable. To order or for further information write: S. Kramer, PO Box 569, Woodstock, N.Y. 12498

MAIL ORDER ACTION

DIRECT ACTION AT LOW COST—in GALAXY/IF S-F MART. 50 cents per word per issue or \$1.00 per word for three issues. More than 50,000 potential customers. Classified ads in GALAXY/IF S-F MART bring results! Write S-F Mart, Galaxy/If, 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017

Facts Beyond the Realm of Human Imagination!



Discover them now in this astounding book, **HAVE YOU LIVED BEFORE THIS LIFE?** by L. Ron Hubbard. Explore the hidden frontiers of the human mind and discover facts stranger than fiction.

Easy to get. Just send \$4.00 to Bookstore IF, Church of Scientology, 1812 19th St. NW Washington, D.C. 20009.

Your copy mailed within 24 hours. Money back guarantee.

Five fantastic ways to leave this world, alive!

Just by adding these science-fiction masterpieces to your library, you can depart any time. To live in the dimension you choose, for as long as you want.

And return, of course, when you like. What a stellar way to go... and come back. For a very non-cosmic price!

TWO NEW GREATS



THE MANY WORLDS OF POUL ANDERSON. This Galactic Emperor's treasure-box sampler includes the best of Anderson—holder of five Nebula and two Hugo Awards. And editor *Roger Elwood* tops it off with careful, affectionate, insightful analyses of Poul's work. An honest-to-goodness tribute to one of science-fiction's abiding geniuses. 288 pages. \$6.95

INFINITE JESTS: The Lighter Side of Science Fiction. Fantastic science-fiction by authors like Aldiss, Pohl, Knight, Lafferty, Russ and six others proves that the realm of laughter lies not very far from the realm of tears. Edited by master science-fiction writer, *Robert Silverberg*, who has won two Hugo and three Nebula awards. 224 pages. \$5.95

THREE POPULAR CLASSICS

DUNE, by *Frank Herbert*. This celebrated Hugo and Nebula Award winner is meticulously plotted, detailed, frightening, exciting, baffling, challenging. It just won't let you go! 412 pages. \$5.95

HIERO'S JOURNEY: A Romance of the Future. By *Sterling Lanier*. This engaging, amusing science-fiction fantasy is set in the post-atomic war civilization of the 57th century. "Hugo material!" LOCUS. 280 pages. \$6.95

AND WALK NOW GENTLY THROUGH THE FIRE and Other Science-Fiction Stories. Ten gripping stories representing the subtle union of precise biochemical technicalities and mystical reverence for the occult. 185 pages. \$6.95

Get these books from your favorite book store, or wherever science-fiction books are sold.

CHILTON BOOK COMPANY Radnor, Pa. 19089

